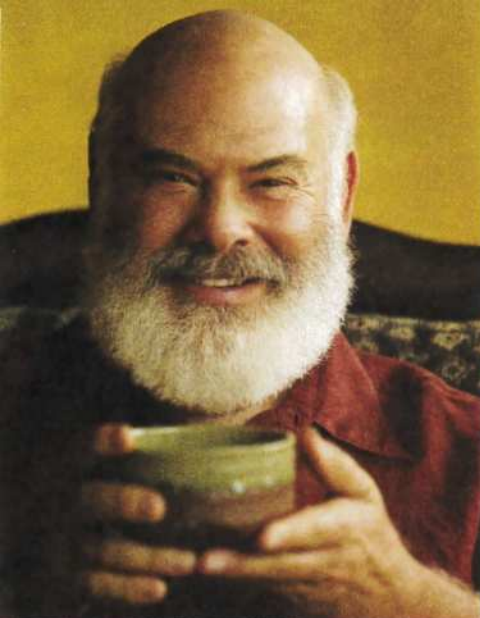




Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing

JANUARY 2008

Creating Optimum Health for Your Body and Soul

Tips for Better Health

Eating **whole grains**, especially barley, at breakfast may help maintain blood sugar throughout the day and boost concentration in the morning.

Getting your **feet** measured may prevent complications such as numbness and even amputation if you have diabetes. Researchers found more than half of 100 diabetics in a recent study were wearing the wrong-sized shoes.

Cooking with fresh **rosemary** may add more than flavor. A compound in the herb called carnosic acid may fight off free radicals in the brain and protect against neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's.

Avoiding the **salt** shaker and choosing "no salt added" foods significantly drops blood pressure. In one study of 60 hypertensive patients, these tactics lowered systolic pressure by 12 points and diastolic by 7 points in just six weeks.

Small Changes Add Up

Tiny lifestyle tweaks reap big health rewards

I've never made a New Year's resolution. Instead of annual promises, I think a better approach is to take small, realistic steps. With this in mind, I came up with seven easy changes that can make a huge difference to your health and happiness in 2008.

Go to sleep and wake up 10 minutes earlier. For me, the early morning offers some welcome quiet time to meditate or appreciate the stillness. When you call it a night sooner and make getting ample sleep a top health priority, it's easier to rise earlier for a few precious moments of peace and solitude.

Have fruit with breakfast. Including fruit at your morning meal provides a head start on your daily quota of antioxidants, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals—without lots of calories. I often go for a cup of berries, but other nutrient-packed gems include kiwi, cantaloupe, mango, papaya, and banana.

Take a breather. Practice breath work or some form of slow, deep breathing for at least a minute a day to help decrease stress. Whether you're at your desk or behind the wheel, the key to this relaxation technique is not the time spent, but doing it regularly.

Stand more, sit less. Sitting for long periods strains your back, neck, and shoulder muscles. Stand up periodically to stretch your legs or take a phone call. Being conscious of your sitting posture and developing strong core muscles to support your spine also lessens the tendency to hunch or slouch in your chair.

Slow down and chew. Fully chewing your food before swallowing it, downing a drink, or taking another bite will delay your pace at mealtime. To ensure a pause, set your utensil down between mouthfuls. The payoff of eating mindfully is being more aware of your consumption, savoring the taste of food, and feeling more satisfied with less of it.

Substitute tea for coffee. Instead of reaching for that second cup of coffee, choose a good-quality tea. You'll get the same comforting warmth and a rich, aromatic flavor. Most teas offer a gentler caffeine buzz, and their antioxidant polyphenols make them a healthier choice.

Seek silence. Escape noise "clutter" by taking a timeout for tranquillity. A rest for the mind and a spa for the spirit, the silence soothes jangled nerves and stress-addled brains. Delay turning on the radio or TV, and welcome the calm.

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My Take on the News

- + The Latest Research
- + Notable Findings
- + Get My Opinion

Dear Reader Making Changes for the Better

Omega-3 Fats Protect Against Alzheimer's

Consuming seafood, omega-3-rich oils, and produce may lower your risk of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. French researchers followed some 8,000 people aged 65 and over for four years. Older adults who had fish at least once a week, ate fruits and vegetables daily, and used omega-3 oils (such as flaxseed or walnut oil) were less likely to develop dementia. Regular use of omega-6 oils (such as sunflower or grapeseed oil) was linked to a greater chance of developing memory problems, noted the study's authors. (*Neurology*, November 13, 2007)

My take Because Alzheimer's begins as an inflammatory process within the brain, boosting intake of omega-3s, which quell inflammation, and decreasing omega-6s, which fuel it, should lower risk. Omega-3s may also deter dementia by improving cardiovascular health and thinning the blood, thereby improving blood flow to and in the brain and preventing neurological damage from reduced circulation. Fish is brain food after all.



Nasal Rinsing Soothes Sinuses

Flushing the nose with a saltwater

rinse, a cleansing technique called nasal irrigation, relieved symptoms in sinus sufferers better than a saline spray did and also reduced the use of sinus medication, report researchers. In a study of 121 adults with chronic sinus problems, half were asked to do twice-daily nasal rinsing, while the others used a saline spray. Both

groups noticed a reduction in the severity and frequency of complaints, but only the nasal irrigators doubled their short-term improvements, a benefit on par with sinus surgery. (*Archives of Otolaryngology*, November 2007)

My take I have always recommended nasal irrigation with warm saline, instead of spray, for chronic sinusitis, congestion, and hay fever. This inexpensive treatment can be done with a cupped hand, bulb syringe, or neti pot, a ceramic vessel (see drweilselfhealing.com to learn how). It works by flushing irritants away from the nasal membranes and bringing blood to the area to speed healing.

Sleep Better with Mind- Body Approaches

Alternative therapies to treat depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances in older adults show promise, concludes a recent review. In an analysis of 33 clinical trials, nearly two-thirds showed positive results when alternative modalities were used for these three conditions. Mind-body approaches, such as relaxation exercises and tai chi, were found to be particularly effective for treating insomnia. As for taking vitamins, hormones, and herbs, the authors said more research was necessary to gauge their benefit. (*Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, October 2007)

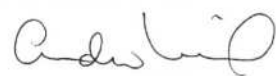
My take I welcome reviews that get doctors to consider non-pharmacological remedies for these conditions. There is considerable evidence for many integrative approaches, and therapies such as aerobic exercise and fish-oil supplements are so low risk that I feel comfortable recommending them as the evidence of their benefit continues to grow.

A new calendar year is often a starting point for change—including the look of this newsletter. Every issue of *Self Healing* will now have a unique color (so you can tell each issue apart), and visuals have been added to make articles more immediate and engaging. This easier-to-read format also features more of my personal advice, views on cutting-edge research, and practical ideas for whole-body wellness. Check out the new “Dr. Weil Explains” column on page 8, where each month I’ll clear up a confusing question posed by a reader.

I’ve also made some changes in my own life. I lost a few unwanted pounds after learning more about the glycemic load and then choosing carbohydrates accordingly. And I recently discovered I enjoy exercise more when it’s part of my daily routine rather than from a formal workout, so I’ve been moving more throughout the day.

Over the years, I’ve also become better at accomplishing goals. I now realize that if I don’t meditate when I get up in the morning, I’m not going to fit it in that day. Other goals, such as setting aside time for myself, are an ongoing challenge. Yet, I’m finding that small changes, such as being mindful throughout the day and focusing on my breath, help me appreciate the moment. I grab a few minutes here and there. It may be while I’m cutting vegetables or traveling to an appointment.

Page 1 offers some additional suggestions on small changes that can make a big difference to you this year. Whatever your goal, I hope you persist with it to achieve a healthy, well-balanced life.


Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, is the founder and director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The author of *Healthy Aging*, *8 Weeks to Optimum Health*, and *Spontaneous Healing*, Dr. Weil is a graduate of Harvard Medical School. He also established **The Weil Foundation**, a nonprofit organization that supports integrative medicine by funding training for practitioners, research, innovations in patient care, and policy reform.

8 Fantastic Foods for 2008

Diversify your plate and beat menu boredom with these nutrition superstars

As the new year unfolds, I'd like to highlight some nutritious foods that I recommend adding to your diet if you haven't done so already. Expanding your food repertoire with a varied menu offers the best chance of getting the widest range of protective phytonutrients through diet and all the nutrients you need.

In the coming months, I also encourage you to make a habit of selecting slow-digesting carbohydrates over ones that are highly processed to help prevent a rapid rise in blood sugar, head off insulin resistance, and minimize weight gain. I predict that science will continue to discover that carbohydrate choices have a powerful effect on your waistline and overall well-being. In the meantime, here are eight great foods—some of my personal favorites—to taste in 2008.



1 | HEMP SEEDS Hemp comes from the same plant (*Cannabis sativa*) as marijuana, but lacks its intoxicating properties.

The seeds do have an impressive fatty acid profile, providing alpha-linolenic acid (an omega-3) as well as stearadonic acid, currently studied by scientists because it's efficiently used by the body to produce EPA, an omega-3 found in fish. I enjoy hemp seeds lightly toasted: Place them in a dry skillet over medium-high heat, stir until they pop and turn light brown, and then season to taste. (I add a sprinkle of soy sauce, red pepper, and garlic powder.)



2 | DRIED BERRIES

I snack on these delicious fruits often.

Because they don't need refrigeration, blueberries and other dried berries are a convenient antioxidant source. I plan to try recipes with goji berries, a relatively new and exotic source of beneficial plant compounds.



3 | DULSE I acquired a taste for sea vegetables when I first traveled to Japan as a teenager, and they remain in my diet for their abundance of nutrients, including calcium, potassium, magnesium, and the trace elements iodine and zinc. Dulse (which rhymes with *pulse*) is one of the easiest varieties to try. Its chewy texture and mildly salty flavor make it good for snacking, right out of the bag. It also works well in soups and salads. You'll find it in the Asian section of natural-food stores.



4 | HAZELNUTS

I believe these nuts, also called filberts, are too often overlooked. They contain more folate and antioxidant proanthocyanidins than any other tree nut. And like other nuts, they provide vitamin E and monounsaturated fats, making them heart-healthy choices. Add them to salads and rice dishes, or enjoy them on their own as a snack.



5 | ADZUKI BEANS

Popular in many Asian cuisines, these small red beans, also called aduki or azuki, have a sweet, nutty flavor. They cook quickly, offer a high dose of protein, and contain easily digestible sugars that won't cause gas and bloating. I use them in many dishes, including my vegetarian chili. Find them at natural-food stores and Asian markets.



6 | FARRO This hearty whole grain, a type of wheat from antiquity, hails from ancient Mes-

opotamia and can replace rice in pilafs and risottos. A standout source of fiber, vitamin E, and magnesium, it's also low in gluten and digests slowly.



7 | FRESH SARDINES

Watch for sardines at the local fish counter. I've noticed in my travels that fresh varieties are increasingly available throughout the United States. They

provide omega-3 fats, and as small, vegetarian fish, they contain fewer contaminants than bigger fish. I enjoy sardines prepared simply: brushed with olive oil, sprinkled with salt, and then grilled and served with lemon. Fresh sardines taste much better than canned ones.



8 | PARSNIPS These root vegetables are also underappreciated, probably because most people haven't eaten parsnips prepared properly.

When done right (I eat them roasted), parsnips have a sweet, earthy flavor. Root vegetables offer an array of nutrients, and their low glycemic load prevents spikes in blood sugar. I often prepare parsnips with other roots, such as rutabagas and carrots. Toss bite-size pieces with olive oil, season with fresh herbs to taste, and roast at 400 degrees until tender and browned.

Old Friends in New Colors

Boost your nutrient range by enjoying favorite fruits and vegetables in alternative hues: purple potatoes, white eggplants, yellow raspberries. These are generally heirloom varieties or developed by cross-breeding, not genetic modification. Orange cauliflower is one of my favorites; it has a high carotenoid content (25 times higher than white) and good flavor. In fact, I think these varieties sometimes taste better than the ones with familiar tints.

The Nutritional Downside of Drugs

Common drugs can rob your body of nutrients

Many medications deplete essential nutrients from your body or interfere with their absorption, causing significant health problems. Symptoms rarely develop right away, making it harder to link the side effect with the drug. And few health professionals know that drugs deplete nutrients, which means your doctor is more likely to prescribe more drugs to treat the side effects than to help restore the nutrients, says James LaValle, a pharmacist who co-authored *The Nutritional Cost of Prescription Drugs* (Morton, 2004). Fortunately, replenishing nutrients can often reduce symptoms.



GOOD FOR YOU!

Eating Real Food

Medication	Nutrients Affected	Supplement Solution
ANTIBIOTICS (such as penicillin or amoxicillin)	Good bacteria, such as some bifidobacteria and acidophilus. Upsetting the gut bacteria blocks nutrient absorption and causes digestive problems.	If on antibiotics, I advise also taking a probiotic supplement (<i>Lactobacillus GG</i> or <i>Bacillus coagulans</i>) with meals and for a few days afterward.
STATINS (cholesterol-lowering drugs, such as Lipitor) or red rice yeast	CoQ10. This antioxidant helps cells use oxygen efficiently and blood vessels function. Deficiency causes fatigue and achy joints and muscles.	I have long advised people taking statins or red rice yeast to supplement with 60 to 90 mg daily of the softgel form of CoQ10.
ANTI-HYPERTENSIVES (diuretics, such as hydrochlorothiazide)	Potassium, magnesium, zinc, and CoQ10. Potassium and magnesium maintain healthy muscles and blood pressure. Zinc can help strengthen immunity. See CoQ10, above.	LaValle suggests eating potassium-rich foods and taking 600 mg of magnesium, 25 to 50 mg of zinc, and 60 to 90 mg of the softgel form of CoQ10 daily.
ANTI-DIABETES (such as Metformin)	B-6, B-12, and folic acid. B vitamins support your nervous system, adrenal function, and metabolism. Shortages may raise risk of kidney and heart disease and dementia.	Take a daily multivitamin or B-50 B-complex supplement with 400 mcg of folic acid.
ANTI-DEPRESSANTS (SSRIs, such as Prozac)	Several B vitamins. These vitamins boost serotonin, protecting against depression. Folic acid may help antidepressants work.	Take a daily multivitamin or B-50 B-complex supplement with 400 mcg of folic acid.

"Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." So begins Michael Pollan's insightful new book, *In Defense of Food* (Penguin Press, 2008). I suggest you commit these seven words of dietary guidance to memory and put them into practice this coming year. Pollan makes a compelling case for real, unprocessed food rather than "edible foodlike substances" created by marketers and food scientists. Among his valuable pieces of advice:

- + Don't consume anything that your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food.
- + Avoid food products containing ingredients that are more than five in number, unfamiliar, unpronounceable, or that include high-fructose corn syrup. They are likely to be highly processed.
- + Avoid foods bearing a health claim. For a food product to be able to make claims on its package it must first *have* a package, so it's more likely to be a processed food than a whole food.
- + Don't get your body's fuel from the same place your car does. Gas stations feature highly processed nonperishable snack foods and extravagantly sweetened soft drinks.

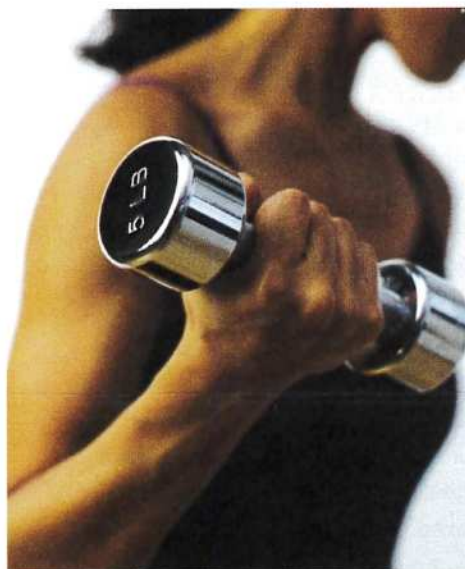
Building Better Bones at Any Age

Six key steps for maintaining a healthy frame

I enjoy good bone health, possibly due to a combination of lifestyle, extra weight I carried as a young adult, and good genes, but I still pay close attention to my frame. It's estimated that 10 million people in the United States have osteoporosis and another 34 million may have low bone mass (osteopenia). The good news is that everyday strategies can go a long way to slowing bone loss and treating it. Here's how:

1 | Know hidden causes. While the risk factors of osteoporosis for women, such as menopause and light bones, are well known, it's now thought that lifestyle factors are responsible for half of all the cases in men, prompting scientists to look beyond aging and family history. Research suggests medications, such as blood thinners, steroids, and antidepressants, may cause bone loss, points out Anne Nedrow, MD, medical director of Women's Primary Care & Integrative Medicine at Oregon Health & Science University. Bone loss also accelerates from smoking, inactivity, and consuming too much soda, caffeine, and alcohol.

2 | Get tested for vitamin D. Surprisingly, all the experts I spoke with recommend that women and men of all ages get tested for vitamin D at least once, with repeat checks based on your risk for deficiency. This hormone is essential for the absorption of calcium and crucial to overall bone health. "Ask your doctor to check levels of 25-hydroxy vitamin D," suggests Greg Plotnikoff, MD, medical director of the Institute for Health and Healing in Minneapolis, who notes that a deficiency of D is common in both young people and seniors, even in sunny areas. People at high risk for bone loss, such as those on certain medications, those with a fracture, and women who have reached menopause, should also talk to their doctor about a bone-density scan to evaluate bone mass and risk for osteoporosis.



"Women are often told to start strong drugs to manage mild osteopenia—not good medicine in my judgment."

3 | Build strength. For most people, walking alone doesn't cut it for better bone health. "Strength and flexibility are key to building bone density and preventing fractures resulting from falls," says Dr. Nedrow. In fact, studies show that for sedentary women, strength training twice a week for a year improved bone mass more than walking 50 minutes four times a week. Dr. Nedrow recommends everyone strength train (with weights or calisthenics) two to three times weekly; increase flexibility through yoga, Pilates, or simple stretching two to three times weekly; and get 30 to 90 minutes of cardiovascular exercise daily.

4 | Rethink your nutrients. I've long believed that a deficiency in vitamin D is much more important than calcium deficiency when it comes to bone loss, and I recommend supplementing with 1,000 IU of D3 (cholecalciferol) daily. To meet calcium needs, women should get no

more than 700 mg of supplemental calcium daily and most men get enough from food. Other nutrients vital to your bones, including vitamin K, magnesium, vitamin C, and potassium, can be gotten by eating an anti-inflammatory diet rich in fresh vegetables such as calcium- and vitamin K-rich broccoli and kale.

5 | Be selective about protein.

Research suggests that getting 20 percent of your daily calories from protein along with supplemental vitamin D and calcium helps maintain bone density. But don't run to the meat counter yet. Studies show that a high-protein diet (more than 30 percent of daily calories) and too much animal protein (more than 2 ounces daily) may cause bone loss. Plant protein, including fermented soy, is a good option, but avoid processed soy foods with soy isolate and textured soy protein, which may block calcium absorption, points out Dr. Plotnikoff. He recommends natto, a Japanese soybean product (available at Asian markets) that's rich in vitamin K and adds a nutty flavor to rice and soups.

6 | Weigh drug risks and benefits.

Lifestyle changes should be your primary strategy to stall bone loss. However, for people with osteopenia or osteoporosis, prescription medications may be necessary. Bisphosphonates, such as Actonel and Fosamax, are the best studied, but they have side effects and there is no guarantee of efficacy. "Sometimes bone-density measures go up with these drugs, but we don't know if the bones reverse to a normal state," says Dr. Nedrow. Other options, such as selective estrogen receptor modulators like Evista, are also available. Discuss with your doctor what is best for you, but I would avoid the supplements DHEA, ipriflavone, and strontium, which show little benefit for bones.

For bone-boosting exercises, visit strongwomen.com.

Healthy Aging

Brightening Night Vision

PROBLEM: Many people over 50 have difficulty driving after sundown because of a decline in night vision. The typical 50-year-old driver may need twice as much light to see as well after dark as a 30-year-old. With age, the pupil of the eye doesn't open as much when you're trying to see in poor light, and the lens becomes more opaque, affecting distance vision and causing problems with glare.

SOLUTION: Certain nutrients can improve night vision, says Delaware ophthalmologist Robert Abel, Jr., MD, author of *The Eye Care Revolution* (Kensington Books, 2004). These include anthocyanins (in dark berries and grapes); carotenoids, especially lutein (in leafy greens and eggs); the omega-3 fatty acid DHA (in oily fish and fortified eggs); and zinc (in whole grains, legumes, and nuts). Besides getting nutrients from food, I suggest taking a daily multivitamin that includes 10,000 to 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids and 8 to 15 mg of zinc. You can also try supplementing with bilberry (80 to 100 mg daily), a cousin of the blueberry thought to improve night vision.

Healthy Eating

Lots Like It Hot

NEW THEORY: A spate of spicy foods on grocery shelves and restaurant menus are thought to be a result of the flow of immigrants into America. But some food scientists and marketers have another explanation: Aging baby boomers "are losing their ability to taste—and turning to spicier, higher-flavor foods to overcome their dulled senses," reports the *Boston Globe*.

REALITY CHECK: Twenty- and thirtysomethings also have a desire for fiery foods, points out Asian food expert and cookbook author Nina Simonds (spicesoflife.com). She believes the trend is fueled more by exposure to spice-driven cuisines, such as Indian and Thai, and less by age. And while smell (which can affect taste) starts to decline around age 40, she says most boomers are "still getting a good sensory experience" without needing to spice up foods.

MY ADVICE: I've long enjoyed spicy foods, such as hot peppers, ginger, and wasabi, and recommend them for their numerous beneficial effects. In my experience, such spices are unlikely to cause digestive distress unless the food is greasy or not well prepared.



How to Remember: It takes at least 20 seconds—or roughly the time needed to sing two rounds of Happy Birthday—to scrub your hands thoroughly, say hygiene experts.

How to Remember: A simple rhyme helps you pick the safest numbered plastic for food and beverages. "With your food use 4, 5, 1, and 2. All the rest aren't good for you."

Ask Dr. Weil

Q Do you prefer a dry or a steam sauna?

A I prefer steam, traditionally produced by pouring water over hot rocks, because it's good for the respiratory tract, while the dry heat of an electric sauna tends to irritate my nose and throat. I find sweat bathing in either type of sauna a good way to encourage the skin's natural detoxification process. To avoid overheating, limit your time to 20 minutes at a stretch, and drink plenty of water before, during, and after the sauna to restore fluids. Check with your doctor if you have high blood pressure or heart disease, as the heat can increase blood circulation and raise your heart rate.

Q I hear almonds are now pasteurized. What does this mean?

A It means that manufacturers are now required to sterilize nuts with chemicals or high temperatures to destroy harmful bacteria. Since pasteurization became mandatory following salmonella outbreaks that were traced to raw almonds, untreated almonds can only be exported outside North America or sold at farmers' markets. Arguing that raw nuts aren't inherently risky and only become contaminated from contact with animal droppings, small farmers' associations are lobbying for a review. They contend that the salmonella incidences were at large factories and that the law implemented in September 2007 puts a financial burden on them. There is also the question of whether steamed nuts can still be considered raw. Since labels don't say how they've been treated, I suggest purchasing almonds from a local farmer or choosing organic varieties, which are not allowed to

use propylene oxide, a potential human carcinogen often used in chemical pasteurization and banned in other countries.

Q Do you recommend hydrochloric acid and pepsin when treating chronic indigestion?

A I don't. I think there are better natural treatments, such as chamomile tea or slippery elm lozenges for chronic indigestion or DGL (deglycyrrhizinated licorice) to treat heartburn. And integrative gastroenterologist Cynthia Robertson, MD, who practices in San Diego, doesn't recommend them either. She tells me that hydrochloric acid, or betaine hydrochloride, supplements are used by some health practitioners, based on the theory that indigestion is the result of low levels of hydrochloric acid and pepsin (an enzyme needed to digest protein that's produced when there's sufficient hydrochloric acid). Taking this supplement is believed to replace a shortfall of stomach acid, but Dr. Robertson warns that it may irritate the stomach and could possibly mask proper diagnosis of the underlying cause of indigestion, a general term for any discomfort or a burning sensation in the upper abdomen after eating.

Before self-treating, get chronic indigestion evaluated by a physician, who can sort out where the symptoms are coming from, suggests Dr. Robertson. Lifestyle factors from stress to a poor diet to alcohol are stomach irritants, and both changing your food habits and practicing relaxation methods can help quiet the digestive system and offer some relief.

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Please send your health questions and comments to **Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing**, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown, MA 02472.

Maximize Your Workout with Interval Training

Vary your exercise intensity to stay fit and motivated

If your regular workout feels stale, kick it up a notch with interval training. Alternating short periods of high-intensity activity with a gentler recovery is hugely popular, says my personal trainer, Dan Bornstein, who has coached me through intervals in my pool and on a mountain bike. They're hard work and tiring, but I felt stronger and noticed my clothes fit better.

Going for it. Research suggests that going between faster and slower-paced activity—or harder and easier work—can vastly improve endurance. Muscles produce more mitochondria (the cell's energy hubs), making them more efficient and boosting their calorie-burning capacity. Even better, you get more bang from your exercise session, especially if you're time-crunched. Without new challenges, your body gets used to a one-pace routine and your fitness plateaus.

Getting started. Test out brief intervals on a walk or treadmill. But have an aerobic base, meaning you can do 60 minutes of semi-vigorous exercise, such as walking or cycling, without feeling out of breath, suggests Bornstein. And check with your doctor first if you have heart problems or hypertension. After warming up, pick up your walking pace for a minute—or between two points, such as a neighbor's house and a stop sign—then

back off for two minutes. Repeat a few more times before cooling down. You can vary the level of difficulty by taking longer strides, pumping your arms more, or simply moving faster.

Making progress. The tricky part of doing intervals is figuring out how hard to push yourself during them (see box). Once you know this, tinker with the time (slightly extending the interval and reducing the recovery) or adjust the intensity (upping the incline, increasing a bike's resistance, adding hills outdoors, or making bigger movements in a pool), but don't change both as a beginner.

Keeping it interesting. Interval training can be adapted to many activities. Indoor equipment is ideal, says Bornstein, because it provides a highly controlled environment. Elliptical machines, stationary bicycles, and treadmills often have computerized interval programs that eliminate the need to manipulate variables on your own. Intervals are a staple of running, spinning (group indoor cycling), and other endurance sports. If you have knee problems and are training on a bike or elliptical machine, avoid lots of resistance work and up your speed instead. People with arthritis can do intervals in the water rather than on land.

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For more information, see acefitness.org.

Beginner's Interval Workout

- 1 Warm up for five minutes by slowly easing into your usual exercise pace.
- 2 Begin your first interval by increasing your speed (or intensity) for one minute. Aim to work at 75 to 90 percent of your maximum heart rate, or feeling "comfortably uncomfortable."
- 3 Recover from your interval for two minutes by exercising at 50 to 60 percent of your maximum heart rate, or "comfortably comfortable."
- 4 Repeat steps two and three about five more times (if possible).
- 5 Cool down for five minutes, gradually tapering your effort.

Where Germs Lurk

Play it safe in these spots at home or in public

Now that cold and flu season is in full swing, pay extra attention to germ-filled surfaces you may be touching. Not all of them are obvious. With some help from University of Arizona microbiologist Charles Gerba, PhD, I've done some surprising comparisons to help you steer clear of viruses and bacteria throughout the year.

Kitchen sponge or toilet?

"There is more contamination in the kitchen sink than on a toilet," says Gerba. Remains of raw vegetables and meat can collect on the moist sponges that are used to clean surfaces. Sponges spread bacteria; change or sterilize them (run sponges through the dishwasher or zap a wet one in the microwave for a minute). Put the toilet lid down before flushing to prevent *E. coli* particles from spraying into the air.

The first-floor button on an elevator or the ATM keypad? They have similar amounts of germs since both spots are rarely cleaned. The first-floor elevator button is like the *enter* button on a keyboard: It's used frequently and is a prime place to pick up cold germs. When I'm traveling or running errands, I keep an alcohol-based sanitizer handy.



The bedspread or remote control in a hotel room?

Studies show the remote is often the first thing touched by unclean hands. Even so, it's a good idea to remove the comforter, which is probably washed less frequently than hotel linens and blankets.

A grocery-cart handle or a drinking fountain?

One of Gerba's studies found that 55 percent of handles on grocery carts were contaminated with bodily fluids (like urine and saliva) and 21 percent showed traces of blood. As for public fountains, the ones at schools rank as the germiest.

Kitchen-sink drain or shower drain?

Because of the mixing of food and water, the kitchen sink has more germs than the shower drain. Microbial growth can occur in stagnant conditions too, so if a rotten-egg smell is wafting from the sink pour $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of baking soda down the drain, followed by $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of vinegar and flush with hot water.

First or middle stalls in restrooms?

"Go for the first stalls because fewer people use them," says Gerba. And don't forget to wash your hands with soap, since restroom door-handles both in and out are havens for germs.

Dr. Weil Explains...

...why parabens found in skin-care products may be unhealthy.

Preservatives called parabens are widely used in personal-care products and cosmetics to prevent the growth of bacteria and mold. They're found in everything from toothpaste to shaving creams to shampoos. I'm concerned about their use because animal studies suggest they are weakly estrogenic and have raised questions about the safety of propyl, butyl, ethyl, and methyl parabens in topical items. Research shows that trace amounts of them were present in breast-cancer tissue and methylparaben may cause dermatitis. Found in moisturizers and deodorants, methylparabens have been linked to irritation—especially on skin with a cut or pimple.

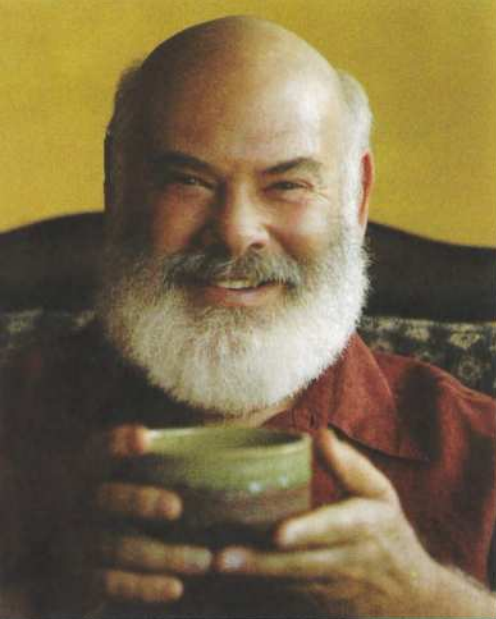
Although parabens have long been used and the FDA considers them safe, I think they are dangerous. Many skin-care companies are now offering healthier alternatives such as sodium benzoate, a fruit-derived preservative. Most health-food stores carry paraben-free products. For help finding paraben-free merchandise, see safecosmetics.org.

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NEXT
ISSUE

- Vitamin D Update
- About Aphrodisiacs
- The News on Chocolate
- Useful Natural Remedies



Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing

FEBRUARY 2008

Creating Optimum Health for Your Body and Soul

Tips for Better Health

Assess your **bone health** by completing an online questionnaire at <http://hipcalculator.fhcrc.org> to determine hip fracture risk in women over 50. A higher risk may call for bone-building lifestyle changes and possibly medication.

Using a **pedometer** pays off. A review of 26 studies found that people with the step-counting devices clocked more than 2,000 extra paces a day, lost more weight, and had lower blood pressure than non-users.

Drink more **water** as the years advance. Age-related changes in certain nerves may cause the brains of older people to underestimate how much water they need to stay hydrated.

A spoonful of **honey** can quell nighttime coughing. Children with a cold given buckwheat honey, a dark variety, had less-frequent and less-severe hacking than kids who took the over-the-counter cough suppressant dextromethorphan.

Chocolate Unwrapped

A little a day can be a tonic for your ticker

Chocolate has been connected with romance since the ancient Mayans consumed it as a beverage at weddings. So Valentine's Day seems

the perfect occasion for me to spotlight some of the growing evidence that chocolate is good for that symbol of love, the heart. Dark chocolate is usually richer than milk chocolate in a subgroup of antioxidant flavonoids called flavanols that are powerful protectors of cardiovascular health. (It also has a better fat content.) In the past year, studies have shown chocolate's beneficial effects on:

Circulation Eating about 1.5 ounces of dark chocolate a day may improve blood flow to the heart, which lessens the risk of angina (chest pain) and heart attacks.

Blood pressure Enjoying just a quarter ounce of dark chocolate per day lowers both systolic and diastolic blood pressure without increasing weight.

Cholesterol Sipping natural cocoa daily boosted HDL ("good") cholesterol in Japanese men. Also, their LDL ("bad") cholesterol was more resistant to oxidation, making it less likely to clog arteries.

Cardiovascular mortality One recent population-based study found that postmenopausal women who consumed more chocolate were less likely to die of cardiovascular disease over a 16-year period.

Chocolate cravings explained?

Whether you're a chocoholic may be programmed into your metabolism. In a Swiss study, "chocolate-desiring" men and other men indifferent to the sweet were put on the same diet for five days. Blood and urine tests revealed that the metabolic profiles of chocolate fans were different from those of non-fans. For example, chocolate lovers had lower LDL cholesterol and higher levels of the beneficial protein albumin. The activity of "good" bacteria in the gut also varied between the two groups. Roberta Lee, MD, of New York's Continuum Center for Health & Healing says this study "represents clinical medicine of the future, in terms of relating intestinal metabolism to food preferences and identifying it as an integral aspect of health."

My advice I think a daily ounce of high-quality dark chocolate is a healthy addition to the diet. I often have this much for dessert, letting the chocolate melt in my mouth for longer-lasting flavor. Look for chocolate that's at least 70 percent cocoa. Some of my favorite brands are Maglio (Italy), Valrhona (France), and Green & Black's (England); to order online, visit worldwidechocolate.com. For drinks reminiscent of traditional Mayan and Aztec beverages, go to kakawachocolates.com.

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My Take on the News

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Dear Reader Foods Enriched with Omega-3s

Pycnogenol to Relieve Aching Knees?

An extract from French maritime pine bark, sold under the brand name Pycnogenol, may benefit people with knee osteoarthritis. In a study of 37 patients, individuals who took 150 mg of the supplement daily for three months had greater improvements in pain, stiffness, and physical function than people who took a placebo. Those in the Pycnogenol group also reported significant reductions in their use of both nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and COX-2 inhibiting medications. (*Nutrition Research*, November 2007)

My take This is a very small study, and I'd want to see more data before recommending Pycnogenol for this purpose. It's expensive, and there are better-studied natural anti-inflammatory agents such as ginger and turmeric (or Zylamend, which includes both). However, there is a growing body of data showing that Pycnogenol has antioxidant properties and may have protective effects in the eye.



Quick Steps to Living Longer

Older adults who can pick up their

walking pace might outlive folks who take slower steps, new research reveals. Among nearly 440 men and women over 65, those who improved their walking speed during one year were less likely to die eight years later than slower movers, suggesting that walking speed is related to overall well-being. (*Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, November 2007)

My take These findings don't surprise me because they validate the health benefits of physical activity throughout life. As the researchers point out, walking speed is easily measured and may be a useful "vital sign" for older adults. It's also a simple test where progress is apparent and where the payoff can mean a longer life. One unanswered question is how much of an increase in walking speed is needed to see this effect. Nevertheless, the take-home message is that exercise is beneficial and increasing your effort, even moderately, is probably a good idea.

Fitness, Not Fat, May Predict Longevity

Fit seniors may live longer than their couch-potato peers, despite being overweight. To assess longevity, researchers measured the fitness level, body composition, and fat distribution in 2,603 adults aged 60 and over. During a 12-year follow-up, participants died earlier if they were older, less fit, and had more cardiovascular risk factors, but body fat did not seem to play a role. Researchers concluded that it might be possible to reduce death rates among older adults—whether thin, normal weight, or obese—by urging them to participate in regular physical activity. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 5, 2007)

My take These results strengthen the argument that if you're overweight and can't shed the extra pounds, you want to be as fit as possible. Getting the right kinds and amounts of exercise, such as strength training two or three times a week and brisk walking for 30 minutes or more on most days of the week, may add years onto your life.

A colleague recently sent me some dark chocolate truffles. But these were no ordinary sweets—each of the 80-calorie truffles also served up 500 mg of omega-3 fatty acids. Now my fondness for high-quality dark chocolate is no secret, and I'm all for people getting more omega-3 fats in their diet, since these nutrients are vital for everything from a focused brain to a stronger heart.

But adding omega-3s to chocolate may not appeal to everyone. Although they're enticing to consumers, I'm not a fan of functional foods eaten for their medicinal value just because they have boosted amounts of certain ingredients. I prefer foods that are naturally abundant in omega-3s and to take them as a supplement, so I know how much of these "good" fats I'm getting.

By eating omega-3-fortified foods you don't always get much of these essential fatty acids, which come in three forms: LNA, EPA, and DHA; the latter two are better used by the body. Hailed by *USA Today* as one of the hottest food additives in 2007, omega-3s are showing up in hundreds of items. You'll find them in fortified orange juice and milk, and they've been added to yogurt, eggs, cheese, and butter substitutes. They are also turning up in cereals, pastas, infant formulas, and pet foods. I think it's fine to get some omega-3s this way, especially in products that contain significant amounts (read labels carefully), but whole foods are still the best way. Some of the products touting their omega-3 content might have teeny amounts, what you would get from just one bite of salmon.

Andrew Weil, MD, is the founder and director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The author of *Healthy Aging*, *8 Weeks to Optimum Health*, and *Spontaneous Healing*, Dr. Weil is a graduate of Harvard Medical School. He also established **The Weil Foundation**, a nonprofit organization that supports integrative medicine by funding training for practitioners, research, innovations in patient care, and policy reform.


Andrew Weil, MD

What Is Making People Fat?

A provocative new book questions long-standing nutritional dogma

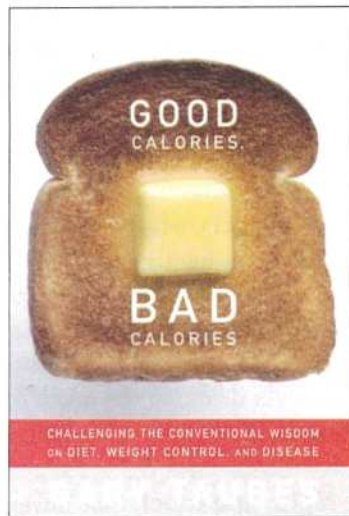
Lately I've been recommending an important new book to my students and colleagues—one that challenges conventional wisdom about diet and health.

In *Good Calories, Bad Calories* (Knopf, 2007), award-winning science writer Gary Taubes dares ask the question: Are the experts wrong about dietary fat?

Nutrition and medical authorities have been telling Americans that the way to lose weight and prevent cardiovascular disease and diabetes is to eat a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet. But after poring over decades of studies, Taubes was surprised to find little evidence to support these recommendations and a strong case for an alternative hypothesis—that it's carbohydrates that make people fat and predisposed to chronic disease.

According to the studies cited by the investigative journalist, carbohydrates cause levels of the hormone insulin to rise, which, in turn, triggers cells to hold onto fat. Worse, there is good evidence that carbohydrates cause this reaction no matter how little food you eat or how much you exercise. This means that people gain weight not because of unhealthy behaviors like under-exercising and over-eating, but because they have a hormonal imbalance that makes them hungry and disinclined to be active. If this carbohydrate hypothesis is true, it explains why weight-loss advice (even my own) to eat less and exercise more so often fails.

Taubes advocates an Atkins-style high-protein diet and, although he says he has no agenda, I think he'd prefer to eat a bacon cheeseburger without the bun three times a day and see others do the same. He says studies show that meat provides all the nutrients you need. Therefore, a diet rich in meat, cheese, and other fatty proteins and restricted in all carbohydrates—even fruits and some vegetables—will offer much better protection against cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other causes of premature death.



“After reading this book, I’m convinced that cutting out quick-digesting carbohydrates is the most important step in fighting excess weight.”

WHERE I AGREE WITH THE BOOK

While it's not easy reading, *Good Calories, Bad Calories* raises important issues. To my mind, the carbohydrate hypothesis offers the best explanation for the epidemic of obesity and the inability to stop it. I agree with Taubes that:

- 1 Most guidelines for weight loss are not just misleading, but wrong. There is little scientific evidence that fats drive obesity and good evidence that carbohydrates do.
- 2 Obesity is not entirely a behavioral problem, but reflects an inherited tendency to develop a hormonal imbalance in response to eating carbohydrates, especially the quick-digesting kinds.
- 3 Insulin is the key player in this scenario because it can cause the cells to store fat rather than releasing it for fuel, even when calorie intake is restricted.
- 4 We gain weight because of this dysfunction in fat storage, not because of an imbalance between calories taken in as food and calories used up in activity.

5 The number of calories you take in is less important than the *kind* of calories. The abundance of quick-digesting carbohydrates in the typical American diet is a sure-fire recipe for weight gain.

WHERE I DISAGREE

I part ways with Taubes on five major points in his book. I believe:

- 1 Carbohydrates are not a problem for everyone—there is a spectrum of carbohydrate sensitivity. Some people can eat all the carbohydrates they want without gaining any extra weight.
- 2 Insulin is not the only hormonal driver behind obesity. Other hormones such as leptin and ghrelin have also been found to affect appetite and satiety. We do not yet have the whole picture.
- 3 Not all carbohydrates are bad. Quick-digesting carbohydrates, especially sugar and flour, are the villains here, not whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
- 4 Not all fats are good. Taubes doesn't discriminate between fats, such as margarine (an artificially saturated fat) and olive oil (a heart-healthy monounsaturated one). Nor does he discuss how excessive intake of omega-6 fatty acids from a person's diet can promote inflammation.
- 5 Fruits and vegetables have a lot to offer. But Taubes is so focused on the carbohydrates in produce that he forgets about their protective phytonutrients.

Bottom line Low-fat, high-carbohydrate diets just don't work for many people, so I don't recommend them. But highly restrictive diets like the meat-heavy one espoused by Taubes are boring and very difficult to maintain. I continue to recommend eating an anti-inflammatory diet with a moderate to high amount of healthy fats from foods like fish, olive oil, and nuts, and a low to moderate amount of healthy carbohydrates from vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. I believe this way of eating (detailed in my books) is best for optimum health.

Anything to Aphrodisiacs?

Find out the best ways to get in the mood for love

I'm no Dr. Ruth, but I agree with the sex expert's quip that "the most important sex organ lies between the ears." Your mind and imagination can be the most powerful aphrodisiacs to stoke your passion and enhance your pleasure. Yet, the search continues for any drug, food, herb, drink, scent, device, or folk remedy thought to stimulate a woman or man's sexual drive or performance. In my opinion, most aphrodisiacs (named for the Greek goddess of love) have more psychological than physiological power—in other words, they evoke a placebo response based on belief and reputation (see box). I'll evaluate some of these claims for you below.

Foods I'm not convinced that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. There's little scientific basis for the many foods claiming to fuel your desire. Of course, chocolate's luscious taste gives pleasure, but its phenylethylamine content might also contribute to its mood-brightening effects. Then there's

Casanova's love for raw oysters; reputedly he ate dozens of them before seducing women. There's only slim evidence that the zinc and amino acids in oysters boost production of testosterone.

Foods in suggestive phallic shapes, such as asparagus, bananas, and carrots, as well as chili peppers, which may trigger the same sweat-inducing and heart-pounding reactions as sexual excitement, all supposedly lift libido. Alcohol is a "social lubricant" that can help remove inhibitions, yet drinking too much of it interferes with sexual performance.

Scent, sight, and touch One intriguing study conducted at the Smell & Taste Treatment & Research Foundation in Chicago measured blood flow to the genitals and found men were the most turned on by the smell of lavender and pumpkin pie while women fancied a blend of cucumber and licorice candy. (Cherry aromas and roasted meat turned off the ladies.) The researchers suspect these fragrances might remind people of childhood, relaxing their anxiety and self-consciousness. While I don't doubt the power of scent, there's only preliminary evidence for it. I think another one of the senses—visual stimulation—may be more important to spark sexual interest in men. Meanwhile, I often hear from older couples that although a desire for intercourse might diminish over time, a desire for intimate touch does not. Humans have a lifelong need to be hugged, held, and cuddled by their partners.

Herbs and drugs I think Viagra is an effective drug; no herb comes close to its power in treating erectile dysfunction. Asian ginseng seems to have a long-term effect that can include increased sexual energy in men. Both ginkgo and L-arginine may influence libido and arousal, but only if the problem is related to impaired blood flow in the body. I don't put much stock in either yohimbe or damiana for spicing up your sex life.

Love Potions Around the Globe

Cultures worldwide have their own aphrodisiacs, which I've learned of in my travels.

- + Chinese men are obsessed with deer antler, tiger bone, or rhinoceros horn, which they grind into pills or put into drinks. That many of these potions come from endangered species only further enhances their mystique.
- + Southeast Asian men may drink snake meat soaked in alcohol, while their counterparts in the Colombian Amazon insist they must have sex within 24 hours if bitten by the mythical *machaca* beetle or they'll die.

GOOD FOR YOU!

Wave Worry Away

Worries can overwhelm the mind. But suppressing them only creates a constant undertone of danger in your unconscious, say psychologist Matthew McKay, PhD, and writer Catharine Sutker. To face your worries and free them to move on, they suggest the following exercise.

Instead of embracing or resisting worry, watch scary thoughts as a sailor watches the waves—as moments that pass without any particular meaning or interest. Don't numb yourself or push them away, but identify worries individually. Let a disturbing thought take shape in your mind. Then bring your attention to your breath. Notice the air spilling into your lungs and pushing your ribs. Feel the release as you exhale. Notice what happens to your focus of worry. Let it evolve and begin its transformation to the next thought. Keep shifting between breath and thought until each thought is just a wave and you are the sailor—watching them pass by.

Source Leave Your Mind Behind: The Everyday Practice of Finding Stillness Amid Rushing Thoughts by Matthew McKay and Catharine Sutker (New Harbinger, 2007)

Vitamin D: What You Need to Know

Five more reasons why almost everyone should take this supplement

It's becoming well known that we need vitamin D (actually a hormone) so the body can absorb calcium for healthy bones, but scientists are finding it may also help prevent numerous chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, autoimmunity, and cancer. Since there are vitamin D receptors throughout the body, this isn't surprising. What is shocking is the number of people with extremely low levels; it's been estimated that 1 billion people worldwide are vitamin D deficient. Study after study is showing that although people produce this hormone naturally from sunlight and take in small amounts from diet, many do not get enough (see box). I've been supplementing with 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 daily for years and suggest others do the same. Below are some of the latest reasons why you need more D.

AGING Research suggests people over the age of 60 make only one-third of the amount of vitamin D from sun exposure as they did in their 20s. "This may be due to the fact that as you age the skin thins and the enzymes needed to synthesize vitamin D are less abundant," explains Louise Gagné, MD, a clinical professor at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada. Low levels of vitamin D have also been associated with poor cognitive performance in seniors, and one recent study found that adequate amounts of the vitamin were linked to a marker indicating significantly lower levels of inflammation and body stress, factors that can slow aging (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, November 2007).

OSTEOARTHRITIS Research suggests osteoarthritis tends to progress faster in people who are vitamin D deficient, says Dr. Gagné. A shortage of vitamin D may also decrease quality of life. A study presented at a recent meeting of the American College of Rheumatology found that a deficiency increased pain and disability in knee osteoarthritis sufferers.



DIABETES Both insulin resistance and insulin secretion have been linked with low stores of vitamin D. A recent 17-year follow-up of more than 4,000 men and women found that adults with the highest levels of the vitamin had a 40 percent lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those with the lowest levels (*Diabetes Care*, October 2007). And previous research has suggested that giving children

supplemental vitamin D significantly reduces their risk of type 1 diabetes.

CANCER It's estimated that hundreds of thousands of cancer cases worldwide could be prevented each year if people raised their vitamin D levels, especially in colder climates where rates of breast, prostate, colon, and ovarian cancers are higher and D levels tend to be lower. The latest evidence comes from research that followed more than 1,000 postmenopausal women in Nebraska over four years. Scientists concluded that those taking 1,100 IU of vitamin D daily had a 60 to 77 percent lower incidence of cancer than women taking a placebo (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, June 2007). And lab experiments show the vitamin stops cancer cells from growing and spreading.

INFECTIONS Boosting vitamin D may be an effective way of warding off colds and flu. It may stimulate immunity by activating peptides in the body that attack bacteria, fungi, and viruses.

For more, see vitamindcouncil.com.

Sunshine Offers No Guarantee

Ultraviolet rays penetrate the skin and induce the synthesis of vitamin D, but spending a week in Aruba won't fill your stores, says Dr. Gagné. "With total body sun exposure, vitamin D production reaches its maximum after about 15 minutes, so brief periods of exposure without sunscreen may help, but any longer and you're just risking sun damage," she says. "When at home, check your shadow at noon; if it's longer than you are, very little D can be made."

Even with sufficient sun exposure, many people still need supplements. One study looking at 93 white, Asian, and multiracial Hawaiians who spent an average of 11 hours outdoors a week without wearing sunscreen found that half of the participants had low levels of D (*Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, June 2007). Factors including dark skin, obesity, heredity, and taking certain medications (such as corticosteroids and antacids) may hinder the body's production of the "sunshine vitamin."

Since there are often no obvious symptoms of vitamin D deficiency, experts now recommend that everyone get a blood test (for serum 25-hydroxy vitamin D) at least once in a lifetime to determine your level.

Healthy Attitude

Small Talk Sharpens Memory

NEW FINDINGS Spending just 10 minutes socializing may help you stay as mentally sharp as doing a daily crossword puzzle. In a recent University of Michigan study, 76 college students were assigned to one of three groups: One group spent 10 minutes in casual conversation, another engaged in mental exercise (including a crossword puzzle), and a third watched 10 minutes of television. Socializing was found to be just as effective as the mental exercises in boosting memory and intellectual performance. Another study by the same researchers, involving 3,610 people aged 24 to 96, found that those with more-frequent social interaction had better mental function.

BOTTOM LINE I'm surprised by the first study that such a short-term change would lead to such an immediate effect, but both studies' findings are consistent with all we know about the protective effect of social connectedness on cognitive function. When I asked UCLA neuroscientist Gary Small, MD, to comment on this research, he remarked, "We need to recognize both the emotional and cognitive benefits of everyday human contact. Given a choice between a *Seinfeld* rerun or a conversation with a friend, pick the latter."

Healthy Living

Getting a Grip on Ice

Here's how to keep your footing on slippery surfaces—and keep your wits if you do take a spill.

WALKING ON ICE Wear low-heeled boots or footwear with sturdy treads on the sole for traction. Approach an icy patch slowly and widen your walking stance by placing your feet more than a foot apart for stability. Keep your body loose and knees slightly bent for a lower center of gravity. Take small steps and plant your whole foot flatly on the ice, shifting your weight slowly from one foot to the other and using your arms for balance. You can even shuffle your feet to feel steadier.

IF YOU SLIP My best advice is to be relaxed. Attempt to tuck your body, lift your head so it doesn't hit the ice, and avoid breaking the fall with your hand, which can hurt your wrist. Both tai chi and yoga can be helpful to reduce your risk of injury and keep your cool.



Remember the difference between HDL and LDL cholesterol by thinking the H stands for "healthy" and the L for "lousy," or that you want HDL to be high and LDL to stay low.

Keep in mind that when you spell *stressed* backwards, you end up with *desserts*. There are better ways than emotional eating to become more relaxed when you feel tense.

Ask Dr. Weil

Q Is thermography a reliable tool to detect breast cancer?

A I don't think thermography, which uses heat-sensing imaging instead of radiation, is an effective screening tool for the early detection of breast cancer, and I continue to recommend that women get mammograms. Although thermography can reveal "hot spot" areas with increased blood flow that could be tumors, the test produces many false positives and when it does pinpoint tumors, it is often too late for an early surgical cure. The problem is that by the time blood vessels form in a tumor, it is already in a phase of rapid growth. A mammogram detects microcalcifications, which are tiny specks of calcium in the breast that may indicate cancer even *before* actual tumors form.

Q Can statins cause memory loss?

A I'm aware of anecdotal reports linking short-term memory loss with this widely prescribed class of cholesterol-lowering drugs, but this possible side effect appears to be uncommon. (Oddly enough, statins have also shown the potential to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.) If you suspect that a statin drug, such as Lipitor or Zocor, is ruining your recall, talk to your doctor, who may reduce your dosage or take you off it. "I believe that temporarily stopping the statin is the best approach," says Illinois-based integrative cardiologist Stephen Devries, MD. If a patient's memory improves after being off the drug for a month, he would typically recommend switching to other cholesterol-lowering approaches such as the non-prescription statin red rice yeast or niacin supplements.

Q Do your concerns about aflatoxin in peanuts apply to peanut butter as well?

A They do. Trace amounts of this natural toxin are produced by certain *Aspergillus* molds that grow on peanuts, peanut butter, nuts, corn, and other grains stored in warm, humid conditions. Aflatoxin is a potent human carcinogen, linked with liver cancer in parts of Asia and Africa where peanuts are dietary staples. I see no need to eliminate peanuts or its butter—just avoid eating them every day or in large quantities.

Q What do you think of spray vitamins?

A I prefer vitamin pills and capsules since I generally view sprays as more of a marketing gimmick not worth the additional expense. The only exception I make is for vitamin B-12, which is better absorbed with a spritz under the tongue (sublingual) than other over-the-counter forms. Manufacturers claim the advantages of spray vitamins are their lack of fillers or binders plus their convenience and easy delivery. Another purported selling point is more-rapid absorption of the nutrients from sprays compared with pills, but this has not been directly studied. There is some evidence that vitamins B-12, B-3 (niacin), and C may be better absorbed through the lining of the mouth as are certain drugs (such as nitroglycerin tablets for angina and bronchodilators for asthma), but in my mind, the science supporting the benefits of spray vitamins (other than B-12) over less-costly pills is still largely insufficient.

Please send your health questions and comments to **Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing**, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown, MA 02472.

Top Remedies for Some of Life's Little Annoyances

Banish blush-inducing problems with these fixes

They aren't usually serious, but the following six health concerns can be embarrassing. Here are my top choices for tackling them.

Bad breath In addition to brushing after meals and flossing daily, clean the back of your tongue, where odor-causing bacteria hide out. You can use a tongue scraper (a metal or plastic instrument available at drugstores) or a toothbrush. And consider a toothpaste or mouthwash, such as Oxyfresh, with chlorine dioxide, a safe and effective germicide.

Dandruff Besides the plethora of over-the-counter antidandruff shampoos, a natural option with some evidence is 5 percent tea tree oil shampoo. You may also want to try supplementing with evening primrose or black currant oil, which are natural sources of gamma-linolenic acid (GLA). This fatty acid promotes healthy skin and hair. Take a 500-mg capsule of either oil twice a day with meals for at least two months. Supplementing with 2 to 3 grams of fish oil a day may also help curb the flaking.

Cold sores To treat cold sores (herpes simplex) around the mouth or on the lips, put a drop of liquid ether on the lesion. Sold at pharmacies, this remedy promotes scabbing and speeds healing. Alternatively, Tieraona Low Dog, MD, director of education at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine, swears by licorice tincture. Apply this antiviral herb to sores with a cotton swab four to six times a day.



Smelly feet Bathe daily and apply rubbing alcohol to your feet to kill odor-causing bacteria. Avoid wearing the same shoes two days in a row and select socks made of natural fibers. When possible, wear sandals. In addition, Dr. Low Dog recommends this herbal foot soak: Steep 4 tablespoons of sage leaves (which have antibacterial properties) in 6 cups of water for 15 minutes. Strain. Add 1 tablespoon of baking soda (which cuts odor). Soak for 10 to 15 minutes twice a week.

Flatulence To reduce gas, chew a half-teaspoonful of fennel seeds after meals to aid digestion. Try taking a daily probiotic supplement, which can make the breakdown of food more efficient and ease gas production. And limit problem foods: Beans, cabbage, broccoli, sodas, dairy products, and high-fat foods are common culprits, as are some food combinations such as fruits and starches.

Toenail fungus Paint 100 percent tea tree oil, a natural disinfectant, on the affected nails twice a day. The toenail needs to grow out for the fungus to clear, so it may take up to a year to get results.

Slim Down, Sweeten Your Breath?

One more reason to shed excess pounds: Research shows that heavier people are more likely to have bad breath. One explanation may be that overweight people are prone to having gastroesophageal reflux disease, which contributes to the problem (*Journal of Dental Research*, October 2007).

Alternatives That Work

Learn three quick and easy do-it-yourself techniques

The way I see it, nothing can replace visits to experienced alternative health practitioners. But for those times when you want to recreate their hands-on healing methods at home, these fast-acting fixes can bring results in minutes.



SELF-MASSAGE Massaging the head is relaxing, making it a perfect remedy for insomnia. Drift off to sleep by doing this modern-day take on an age-old massage from India found in *5-Minute Massages* (Hamlyn, 2006).

How-to Rest your three central fingers above each eyebrow. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then, place your middle fingers on either side above the bridge of your nose (see photo). Use them to apply light pressure in a slow circular motion outward to your temples. Repeat this motion, each time inching your fingers up slightly on your forehead until they are following your hairline to the nape of your neck. Next, using a few fingers, work from the center of your forehead across your scalp and back down your neck. Finish by kneading your scalp.

FELDENKRAIS METHOD By increasing awareness of your body's movement, this Feldenkrais exercise from the book *The Busy Person's Guide to Easier Movement*

(Intelligent Body Press, 2006) loosens stiff hips and knees and builds balance.

How-to Rest your right hand lightly on the back of a chair, while standing to the left of it. Bend your right knee so your heel lifts off the floor. Repeat this motion several times. Next, lift the ball of your foot so your weight falls back onto

your heel. Rock back and forth several times (your body should not move, but your hips may). Every so often, close your eyes. Switch sides and repeat this sequence. Finally, return to the left side of the chair and alternately lift the ball of one foot and the heel of the other, slowly working up to a higher speed.

ACUPRESSURE There are almost as many different acupressure points to tame a headache as there are types of headaches, but I've heard good reports about the large intestine 4 or LI 4 point located between the thumb and index finger. Use this simple approach to quickly relieve headache pain (it may also help keep your digestive system healthy).

How-to Make an O shape with your index finger and thumb. Rest your thumb from your opposite hand on the bulge of muscle between your thumb and pointer, and wrap your other index finger on the palm side of LI 4. Apply pressure for one minute. Then switch hands and repeat.

Dr. Weil Explains...

...the difference between alpha-lipoic acid and alpha-linolenic acid.

Their names sound similar, but alpha-lipoic acid (ALA) is an antioxidant that helps mitochondria—the powerhouses of cells—produce energy. It may also decrease insulin resistance and help treat and prevent diabetes complications, such as peripheral neuropathy. The body produces ALA, but in decreasing amounts with age. It's also in foods such as spinach, liver, and brewer's yeast. I believe that taking 400 mg of ALA a day (along with 1 gram of acetyl-L-carnitine) may help protect cells against free-radical damage.

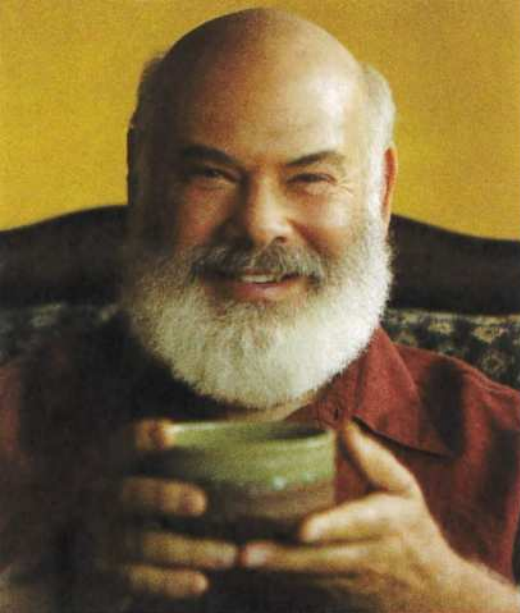
Alpha-linolenic acid (LNA) is an omega-3 fatty acid made by plants. It's mainly found in seeds, nuts, and oils derived from them. LNA is converted in the body to the omega-3s found in fish (EPA and, to a lesser extent, DHA), but the conversion isn't efficient. That's why I recommend taking fish oil rather than flaxseed oil. But I still suggest eating LNA-rich foods. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons of freshly ground flaxseed on salads, cereals, or vegetables each day, or snack on some raw walnuts.

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- Medical Tourism's Allure
- Environmental Threats
- Exercise & Your Memory



Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing

MARCH 2008

Creating Optimum Health for Your Body and Soul

Tips for Better Health

Keep your **cool** to help prevent cardiovascular disease. A recent study found that people with higher levels of hostility had lower levels of certain heart-healthy antioxidants.

Regular **exercise** may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease by 30 to 40 percent, according to an analysis of 17 studies that explored the effects of physical activity on dementia.

Good **habits** pay off. People who quit smoking, drink moderately, exercise, and eat five daily servings of produce live an average of 14 years longer than people with none of these behaviors. Giving up smoking had the most benefit, followed by eating fruits and vegetables.

Yoga may help treat depression, suggests one small study. Patients already taking antidepressant medication who attended six or more Iyengar yoga classes showed reductions in depressed mood as well as less anger and anxiety.

Global Views on Aging

Cultural differences shape concerns about later life

I don't worry too much about getting older. By leading a healthy lifestyle, I'm hoping to reduce the risks and delay the onset of age-related diseases, so that the time of illness and decline at the end of life will be squeezed into the shortest period possible. (The technical term for this is "compression of morbidity.") I also know that concerns about aging are very common not only in the United States but around the globe. Interestingly, *what* people fear about the passing of time varies greatly from country to country, says a survey by GfK Roper Consulting, a market research firm.

A world of worries

Adults and teenagers in 31 nations were asked to identify which of 18 conditions they're most worried about. Germans fret most about losing their memory or mental alertness. The Dutch fear gaining weight, and Thais dread fading eyesight. Americans spread their top concern among reduced energy levels, trouble caring for themselves, memory loss, and weight gain. Worries about aging are widespread in Japan, the country with the world's oldest population, while people in Egypt (a younger nation) are much less worried about most conditions.

Also, different concerns come to the fore among people aged 50 and older in

various cultures. In Sweden, 52 percent of this age group worries about lack of energy, more than in any other country. The greatest concern about losing hair or having it go gray was found in India. Brazil took the prize for most anxiety about reduced sexual drive. And South Africans were most worried about hearing loss. Diane Crispell, executive editor of the consulting firm, suggests that such fears may reflect what people generally value in a culture and thus don't want to lose. For instance, the Swedes she knows take pride in being hale and hearty.

Address your own fears

Wherever you reside on the planet, I'd suggest that you identify your particular concerns about growing older as well as specific actions you can take to reduce risk in those areas. Such a proactive approach can not only help you live as long and as well as possible, but also ease your mind. And rather than dwelling on the losses that time may bring, I encourage you to recognize and appreciate the benefits of aging, such as richness of experience, depth of character, a more serene disposition, and perhaps wisdom. Just as fine wine, a good violin, or an old tree gets better with age, you can too. (For more on the positive aspects of growing older, see my book *Healthy Aging*.)

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My Take on the News

- + The Latest Research
- + Notable Findings
- + Get My Opinion



Menopausal Symptoms Worse for Overweight Women

Entering menopause with a healthy weight may reduce common symptoms associated with the transition. The higher a woman's percentage of body fat at menopause, the more likely she is to experience hot flashes and night sweats, concluded a study that looked at 1,776 women aged 47 to 59. Researchers speculate that excess fat could make it more difficult for the body to dissipate heat. (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, January 1, 2008)

My take A growing body of evidence tells us that fat, especially abdominal fat, is an endocrine organ, not just calorie-storing tissue. Excess body fat has been shown to have significant effects on metabolism and hormone production. So I'm not surprised by these results, which give women one more reason to manage their weight throughout life. If you're bothered by hot flashes, my top herbal remedy is black cohosh: Start by taking 40 mg daily of a standardized extract such as Remifemin and then increase the dose if needed. For more on taming hot flashes, see the January 2007 issue.

One Meal Can Make a Difference in Your Health

A single meal can have immediate effects on your health, for better or for worse. A review of dietary research suggests that just one high-fat, high-sugar meal—such as a hamburger, French fries, and soft drink—can inflame tissues, generate free radicals, constrict blood vessels, and

raise blood pressure more in response to stress. Plus, the sudden increase and then drop in insulin can leave you feeling hungry again sooner. In contrast, healthier fare such as fresh produce, legumes, and whole grains can keep blood sugar levels more stable. (*Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, January 22, 2008)

My take Each time you sit down to eat offers another opportunity to improve your health. These findings should give you more incentive to follow a lifelong way of eating that protects and nourishes your body, like my anti-inflammatory diet.



Can Taking a Calcium Supplement Raise Your Heart Risk?

Older women who take calcium supplements might have an increased risk of heart attack. Researchers followed nearly 1,500 healthy postmenopausal women (average age: 74) for five years, during which time half took 1,000 mg of calcium daily while the other half took a placebo. Heart attacks were found to be more common in the women taking the calcium supplements. (*British Medical Journal*, February 2, 2008)

My take I consider this research preliminary, and it's not clear why calcium supplements would have this effect. For now, I advise women to not exceed 700 mg of supplemental calcium daily (1,000 to 1,200 mg total from both food and supplements); to take at least 1,000 IU of supplemental vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), which I believe to be even more important to bone health than calcium; and to watch for more information on this issue.

Dear Reader The Growth of Concierge Care

One of the editors of *Self Healing* tells me she received a letter from her physician of more than 20 years saying he was leaving his practice to pursue a more personalized approach to health care. This new approach—including round-the-clock access to her doctor and comprehensive physicals—would cost her nearly \$4,000 a year (paid upfront and not covered by health insurance). She opted to switch physicians instead of joining his “boutique medicine” practice.

A relatively new phenomenon, boutique medicine—or concierge care—describes several hundred practices found mostly on the East and West Coasts. It strikes me as a logical response to the deterioration of health care in this country. I can see how boutique medicine avoids a lot of things doctors don't like, such as mounds of paperwork, rushed office visits, and huge patient loads (a typical primary-care physician has 2,500 to 3,000 patients while boutique practices average 300 to 600). Patients are essentially paying for more attention—ideally, better-quality care.

Concierge care creates an elite track of medicine, catering mainly to the affluent, who can afford fees ranging from \$1,500 to \$12,000 a year for a doctor's full attention, along with other “luxury” amenities such as personalized wellness programs. Controversial among physicians and raising both ethical and legal questions, boutique medicine is in my opinion not the solution to our health-care problems. What is? I'll discuss that in my next book, to appear early in 2009.


Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, is the founder and director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The author of *Healthy Aging*, *8 Weeks to Optimum Health*, and *Spontaneous Healing*, Dr. Weil is a graduate of Harvard Medical School. He also established **The Weil Foundation**, a nonprofit organization that supports integrative medicine by funding training for practitioners, research, innovations in patient care, and policy reform.

Sugar: How Bad Is It for You?

Too much sweet stuff can undermine your health, so enjoy it in moderation

It's no secret that sugar has saturated the American diet, turning up in most of the processed foods that many of us find so palatable. It's my belief that this sugar overload could be contributing to many chronic diseases across the United States, because many people consume vastly more than the amount their bodies can handle.

Still, I think it's okay to keep your sweet tooth satisfied, if you're careful about how you do it. Read on to find out how sugar affects your health, and how to temper your intake.

Sugar's not-so-sweet effects My biggest concern about sugar has to do with its impact on insulin levels. This hormone is produced by the pancreas and regulates the conversion of glucose into energy for your cells. But an excess of sugar can burden the pancreas and make cells resistant to insulin. This causes glucose to build up in the bloodstream—a major factor in the development of type 2 diabetes. The disturbance in glucose metabolism also promotes a quicker conversion of calories into fat, which readies you for weight gain (and all the health problems that come with it).

In some people, a high-sugar diet may even elevate blood-fat levels, increase susceptibility to yeast infections, aggravate arthritis and asthma, and of course promote tooth decay.

Benefits of breaking a sugar habit

I recommend scaling back on sugar for another important reason: It moves you toward a more anti-inflammatory diet. By working to control inflammation, you can help strengthen your defenses against heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and many forms of cancer.

You may also find that cutting back on sugar makes you feel better. High sugar intake has been linked to depression and mood swings. To get an idea of how powerfully sugar might influence your



emotional and mental well-being, I'd suggest going sugar-free for two weeks and taking note of any differences in your mood and energy levels.

Sugar-slashing strategies It's not necessary to swear off sugar altogether. In my own kitchen, I like to keep maple syrup, honey, and sugar on hand. Although most of the white sugar I buy goes into my hummingbird feeder, I do sometimes add small amounts of it to stir-fries and

other dishes and use a bit of brown and raw sugar in preparing foods.

You should, however, phase out certain sugar-packed foods and beverages from your diet. Start by giving up soft drinks and any other items sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup, including some jams, jellies, syrups, and condiments. While the amount of fructose (fruit sugar) that you would get from eating an apple or a peach is fine, the large quantities found in high-fructose-sweetened foods can upset your liver metabolism and increase your levels of blood fats.

As you're striving to cut back your consumption, make dessert an occasional indulgence rather than a regular part of your everyday meals. And when it comes to selecting sweets, try to relieve your craving without binging on sugar. For instance, choose good-quality dark chocolate made with at least 70 percent cocoa instead of a milk-chocolate bar that lists sugar as its first ingredient. Also, pass up foods that pair sugar and fat, and reach for treats that contain modest amounts of sugar (such as fruit sorbets).

The Lowdown on Sugar Substitutes

Turning to sugar substitutes may seem like a sensible strategy for cutting back on calories. But since artificial sweeteners can sometimes end up worsening sugar cravings—and because many of these substitutes may be harmful—I think you're better off using sugar occasionally, especially given the lack of evidence that artificial sweeteners make it easier to lose weight.

In fact, stevia and tagatose are the only two sugar substitutes I'd consider. Extracted from the leaves of a South American shrub, stevia contains zero calories but is 250 to 300 times as sweet as sugar (and bears a licorice-like flavor). Tagatose has a third of sugar's calories and 92 percent of its sweetness. It's made from milk sugar, also known as lactose, and it may trigger digestive problems in some people. Both sweeteners are safe for people with diabetes (and others who can't tolerate sugar), but there's no evidence that either of them can help with weight loss.

As for other natural sweeteners, I don't find that maple syrup, molasses, or honey offer much benefit over white sugar beyond their trace-mineral content (as well as strong flavors that might discourage overdoing your intake).

Medical Tourism's Allure

Crisscrossing the globe in search of better care

A friend of mine raves about the successful hip replacement surgery she had in Belgium after failing to find the level of care she wanted in the United States. And she's not alone. Nearly half a million Americans are expected to seek medical treatment abroad this year, fueling the growth of medical tourism. In fact, I would consider it myself if the need arose. I think the risks of being in a US hospital are increasing on account of financial constraints that have lowered the quality of care. Many countries have responded well to the resulting business opportunity.

Top destinations such as India, Thailand, Singapore, and Costa Rica can be attractive alternatives for procedures such as dental work, LASIK eye repair, and even heart surgery and cancer treatments. Medical tourism also holds potential for the expansion of integrative medicine, especially in places like India and Dubai that already have the knowledge base and are successful at attracting foreigners. To become an educated consumer, do your homework in advance.

Know the pros and cons. The main attraction of medical tourism is that patients can save up to 75 percent if they

travel abroad. But money is not the only reason. Some foreign hospitals are better staffed and offer top-notch care and luxury amenities such as spa services, high-end restaurants, and recovery retreats.

The downside is that, in addition to being far from home, most health insurers don't cover procedures abroad, and if something goes wrong, a foreign legal system can be a nightmare.

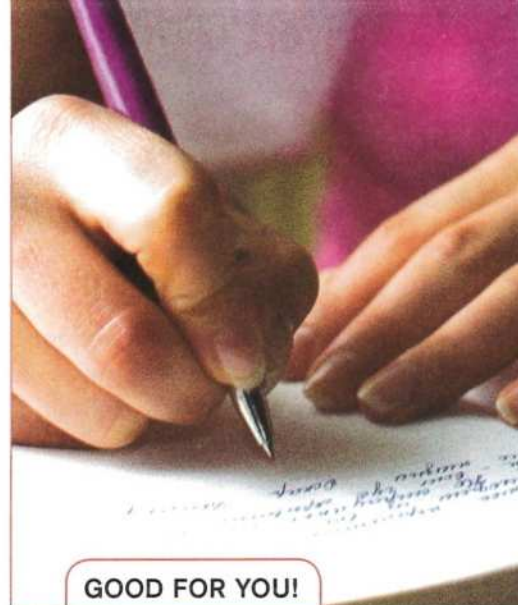
Do your research. Ask around for referrals. Ideally, you want to talk to someone who has had the same procedure you're seeking. Some of the larger hospitals in foreign countries are affiliated with US medical centers or have agreements with US health insurers to offer discounts on procedures that aren't typically covered. And check the facility's rating with the Joint Commission International (jointcommissioninternational.com), an organization that analyzes foreign medical centers to see if they meet American standards. If you're looking for help with the legwork, you may want to contact a company specializing in medical tourism (see resources below).

For more, see medicaltravelauthority.com and *Patients Beyond Borders* by Josef Woodman (Healthy Travel Media, 2007).

Key Questions You Need to Ask

Make sure your insurance company, doctor, or the medical center you're considering can answer the following questions.

- + What is the hospital's (and the doctor's) success rate with this procedure?
- + Who are the physicians and what are their qualifications?
- + Does the facility have an international patient center to help plan my trip?
- + What does the price quote include? What about tariffs and taxes? How are recovery costs handled? (Ask for a breakdown.)
- + Does my insurance cover any of the services? Does the insurer have a relationship with any foreign medical centers?
- + Does the hospital have a recuperation program at a recovery resort or hotel?
- + Is there a post-op communication plan with my doctor at home?
- + What is the emergency procedure if something goes wrong?



GOOD FOR YOU!

Write Your Future

There is no shortage of self-help books with advice on how to be happier, but I'd like to share a simple writing exercise that's been shown in studies to boost mood.

Sit in a quiet place, and take 20 to 30 minutes to think about what you expect your life to be one, five, or ten years from now. Visualize a future for yourself in which everything has turned out the way you've wanted. You have tried your best, worked hard, and achieved all your goals. Now write down what you imagine that life to be like.

In one study, participants who wrote about their best possible selves on four consecutive days reported greater increases in their happiness levels compared to people who wrote about other topics, and they even had fewer physical ailments five months later. Other studies that have involved writing about such positive visions over several weeks back up these findings. Researchers suggest this exercise may work by fostering optimism and increasing motivation to work toward desired goals.

Source *The How of Happiness* by Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD (Penguin Press, 2008)

Top Environmental Health Threats

Follow my advice to keep yourself safe from six common hazards

It can be a challenge to stay healthy in an unhealthy world. A 2005 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention discovered 148 toxic chemicals in the bodies of Americans, including many that cause cancer and genetic mutations. Here are the six environmental health threats that concern me most, and my advice on how to handle them. In addition to making the recommended changes below, I encourage you to contact lawmakers about these issues; I believe the problems will persist until there's a loud public outcry.



1 | Plastics I've made an effort to reduce my use of plastics based on emerging research that harmful chemicals can leach from them

when foods are stored or heated in them. Of particular concern are bisphenol A (BPA), found in polycarbonate products including water bottles and baby bottles, and phthalates, used to make plastics pliable. Scientists believe these chemicals cause cancer and irreversible organ damage in fetuses and children. Last fall, California banned the manufacture and sale of toys that contain phthalates, following a similar ban by the European Union. The city of San Francisco has also outlawed childcare products made with phthalates. I believe such measures are justified and recommend that you use plastics with care. (For more information on safe plastics, see the September 2006 and December 2006 issues.) Because some plastic water bottles contain BPA, I now use a stainless steel bottle (visit mysigg.com or kleenkanteen.com).



2 | Air pollution

In addition to causing respiratory problems, air pollution poses a serious threat to cardiovascular health. In January, scientists at the University of California, Los Angeles, reported that the tiny particles in vehicle emissions

may be especially harmful, promoting hardening of the arteries by reducing the heart-protective qualities of HDL cholesterol. Limit your exposure by observing air advisories, and don't exercise outside when ozone levels are high (visit airnow.gov for air quality reports). To reduce the damaging effects of air pollution, I suggest eating a diet rich in antioxidants from fruits and vegetables as well as taking my daily antioxidant regimen: 200 mg of vitamin C, 400 IU of natural vitamin E (or 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols), 200 mcg of selenium, and 10,000 to 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids.



3 | Ionizing radiation

We have known for decades that exposure to ionizing radiation—the type used in x-rays and CT scans—can damage DNA, causing cell mutations and cancer. These tests can be useful diagnostic tools, but because there is no such thing as a safe dose of radiation, agree to them only if necessary. Women should discuss when to begin receiving mammograms with their doctors. Although they are the best screening tool for breast cancer, they still use a small amount of radiation—about what you get from naturally occurring radiation over three months.



4 | Nonionizing radiation

The case here is less clear and more controversial, but I'm increasingly suspicious about the risks posed by weaker, nonionizing radiation, including the electromagnetic fields (EMFs) emitted by cell phones. EMFs may disrupt the body's healing system and its controls on normal cell growth, which could weaken immunity and increase susceptibility to cancer. (Officials in India recently banned cell phone sales to children under 16, who may face greater risks because their brains are still developing.) I recommend that you limit cell phone use. When I have to talk on

a cell phone, I use an earpiece; placing even a foot of space between your body and the phone greatly reduces your exposure to EMFs. The same goes for appliances such as plug-in electric clock radios and hair dryers, which also emit EMFs: Keep them at least a foot away from your body. Of greater concern are electric blankets, mattress covers, and heating pads: Avoid them.



5 | Agricultural chemicals

The pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides applied to crops and lawns are poisons, and the more you can reduce your exposure to them, the better. Some have estrogenic effects, which I believe may be one factor in the worldwide epidemic of breast cancer. Others may be linked to lymphoma and Parkinson's disease. And researchers suspect that even small amounts of these chemicals, when combined, can interact to intensify harm. Procure pesticide-free food by choosing items with certified organic labels, or by asking around at your local farmers' market. (Some growers don't use chemicals on crops, but can't afford to get certified organic.) I try to grow my own food or buy organic when possible. And I don't use any chemical pesticides on the grounds around my home.



6 | Water pollution

I'm obviously very concerned about the pollutants in our waterways and flowing from our taps. Nitrates, lead, and chlorine byproducts are just some of the harmful substances that may be in there. Learn about the drinking water in your community by visiting ewg.org, and consider testing your home water supply. The kinds and levels of contaminants that are found can help determine what type of water filter is best for your home. For facts on the different types of water filtration systems, visit nsf.org/consumer/drinking_water/dw_treatment.asp.

Healthy Aging

Men and Their Midlife Health Slump

PROBLEM Some men are slackers about their health at midlife, according to data that show men 45 to 54 are the least likely to work out and be diet conscious and the most likely to have had their last physicals more than five years ago. Based on a recent survey of nearly 11,000 men aged 18 and older, researchers attribute the dip in healthy living to work and family stress. They suggest that men only come out of the slump when health concerns arise later in life.

SOLUTION I've noticed this malaise, which may strike as men see their bodies changing and need to give up fantasies of being young forever. Yet, middle age is when men are susceptible to the first symptoms of cardiovascular disease, and they need to be vigilant about tuning up lifestyle factors for the second half of life. This means getting a checkup to assess overall health and identify areas that need improvement. I also recommend men and women spend more time around people with their desired health habits, whether it's exercising regularly, eating well, or managing stress.

Healthy Eating

Black: A New Health Hue

NEW TREND Black is now becoming more fashionable in food: Ebony edibles are red-hot in Japan and slowly appearing on Western plates. Dark ingredients include everything from black soybeans and black rice (which looks purple-black when cooked) to black vinegar and black mushrooms, all richer in flavor and nutrients than their paler counterparts. Other popular deep-hued foods in Japan include black sesame-seed cereal, black vinegar beverages, and black soybean coffee or cocoa drinks.

MY TAKE This sounds to me like a very Japanese trend since that culture focuses on the aesthetics of food and loves the odd and quirky. The contrast of a dark food placed on a white plate earns style points for being novel and interesting, but black foods may also offer a real nutritional benefit. Many of their healthful properties come from high levels of anthocyanin pigments, powerful antioxidants. Americans are already familiar with blackberries (the top source of antioxidants among commonly eaten foods) and black beans, and may catch on soon to the benefits of eating more black.



A woman's **personality** doesn't make her prone to get breast cancer, according to a Dutch study. Traits such as anxiety and anger had no relationship with breast cancer risk.

Exercise may slow **aging**. Structures inside cells called telomeres tend to shrink with age, but physically active adults have telomeres like those of someone nine years younger.

Ask Dr. Weil

Q Do alfalfa supplements help reduce arthritis pain?

A I know of no reason to take alfalfa supplements to treat arthritis pain or any health concern. Although they contain some protein, vitamins, minerals, and fiber, there is no scientific proof that alfalfa relieves inflammation or benefits joint stiffness. Your best bets for arthritis pain are an anti-inflammatory diet, weight control, physical activity, glucosamine supplements (which are much better studied), and a natural anti-inflammatory for flare-ups, such as turmeric, ginger, or Zylamend, which has both of these herbs.

Q Is there a special diet for polycystic ovarian syndrome?

A This endocrine (hormonal) disorder in women is marked by irregular menstrual periods, excess hair growth, and enlarged ovaries with multiple cysts, and it's a common cause of infertility. I would avoid conventionally raised beef and dairy products, which often contain residues of estrogenic hormones given to animals as growth promoters. Increase your intake of whole soy foods such as tofu, tempeh, soy milk, and edamame; the isoflavones in soy may help to even out hormone imbalances. Because the condition has been linked to chronic low-grade inflammation, I also recommend an anti-inflammatory diet. Plus, I've had success with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM); treatments typically include dietary changes, herbal remedies, and acupuncture. To find a TCM practitioner, contact the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine at nccaom.org or (904) 598-1005.

Get Fit, Stay Sharp

Exercise can prevent or even reverse some age-related changes that occur in the brain

Q Any advice for quitting smoking?

A Most important are motivation and a commitment to quitting. Set a date to quit, get your coping strategies in place, and then do it! There's no one right approach: Some people may benefit from smoking-cessation programs that cover the behavioral changes needed to quit and that offer a supportive environment. Acupuncture or hypnosis may work for others. I suggest finding new smoke-free ways to relax, such as yoga or meditation, and trying the Relaxing Breath exercise described in my books.

Q Should I eat seaweed daily?

A I think it's a healthy addition to the diet, but I don't see it as a necessity. Also called sea vegetables, edible seaweeds are low in calories and packed with nutrients including vitamins A, C, E, and B-complex as well as calcium, magnesium, and iron. Seaweed also provides protein, fiber, and even some omega-3 fatty acids. Preliminary research suggests that consuming certain types of seaweed may reduce inflammation, help treat PMS, and reduce the risk of breast cancer. On the downside, seaweeds have much higher amounts of sodium than land-based greens because of their ocean origins, so people who have hypertension or are salt sensitive should eat them sparingly.

You may want to experiment with different seaweeds. I enjoy nori in sushi rolls and sprinkled on dishes, wakame and dulse in salads, hijiki in some stir-fries, and toasted dulse on sandwiches.

Please send your health questions and comments to **Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing**, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown, MA 02472.

While I think that mental workouts such as solving crossword puzzles or learning a new language are great ways to preserve your memory as you age, I want to tell you about some fascinating recent research on how physical activity can help keep your brain young.

Previously, population-based studies showed that older people who got regular exercise had a lower risk of cognitive decline. Plus, small clinical trials found that seniors assigned to fitness programs improved in so-called executive functions like multitasking, screening out distractions, and working memory (the type used to remember a house number while walking from the car to a party). Now scientists are using brain-imaging technology to explore how moving your body can have beneficial effects on the brain's structure and function.

New brain cells In a 2007 study, Columbia University researchers tracked blood flow and cell growth in the brains of mice while exercising and afterward. They found an increase in brain cells in a region linked to normal age-related memory decline. Scientists then looked at the brains of 11 people during and after a three-month aerobic exercise regimen. They detected similar blood-flow changes as in mice, implying new cells were forming in the memory-related area. Participants also did better on memory tests after the exercise program.

Increased brain volume Seniors who took an hourlong walk three days a week for six months experienced increases in brain volume, particularly in frontal areas that are associated with memory and that tend to shrink with age. On scans, their brains looked like those of people three years younger, says Arthur Kramer, PhD, a neuroscientist at the University

of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who co-authored the groundbreaking 2006 study.

Miracle-Gro for the brain One explanation for these positive changes is that exercise raises levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or BDNF. This protein serves as "Miracle-Gro for the brain," writes Harvard psychiatrist John Ratey, MD, in his new book, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* (Little, Brown; 2008). He says BDNF "improves the function of neurons, encourages their growth, and strengthens and protects them against the natural process of cell death." Interestingly, a 2007 German study found that interval training—alternating bursts of intense physical activity with longer periods of lighter exercise—increased BDNF more than low-intensity workouts.

Bottom line My standard recommendation of 30 to 45 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, such as walking briskly, cycling, or swimming, at least five days a week should be enough to help keep your mind sharp. So far, there's been little research on nonaerobic activity, although a 2006 study indicates strength training can also boost memory in older adults. Dr. Ratey says the best workouts may be those that exercise both your heart and your brain at the same time, such as playing tennis or taking up tango.

Phys Ed Earns Extra Points

With a greater focus on standardized testing, many schools have cut physical education in hopes of boosting academic performance. Yet, school-age children who are more aerobically fit tend to score *better* on standardized tests of math and reading.

Umami Explained

The fifth basic taste finally gets some recognition

became familiar with *umami* or the “fifth taste” over a decade ago from my interest in Japanese cooking. Unlike the four better-known basic tastes (sweet, salty, sour, and bitter), umami (pronounced *oo-MA-mee*) is not as easy to describe; “savory” and “meaty” are sometimes used. It’s been a mainstream taste in Japan for almost a century, and you’re likely to hear more about umami as Westerners catch on to its appeal.

The term is often equated with glutamate, an almost pure form of the umami taste found in foods such as miso and ripe tomatoes, but this amino acid derivative is not the only source. A few other amino acids have the taste to a lesser degree, as do breakdown products of protein, called ribonucleotides, found in mushrooms and some seafood. In fact, I go for umami in my own cooking. In addition to the foods mentioned above, walnuts, almonds, red bell peppers, legumes, and Parmesan cheese all provide it and are staples in my kitchen. Umami foods can also be used as an ingredient to alter other tastes—they make salt saltier, sweet sweeter, and sour and bitter less potent in recipes.

Exploring the science of taste

Although the Western culinary world was already creating dishes that taste umami, scientific proof changed the way



chefs approached it. It was the discovery of taste receptors in 2001 that made chefs pay more attention to foods that go together and enhance the umami taste, says Gary Beauchamp, PhD, director of the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia. “There was no need to prove sweet because it was already accepted—the findings just confirmed it—but multiple receptors were discovered for umami too, which makes it much more likely that it’s a basic taste as well.”

Now you can find umami-labeled dishes at some popular restaurants throughout the United States and Europe, and there are even umami cookbooks: *The Fifth Taste* by David and Anna Kasabian (Universe, 2005) includes recipes from 25 well-known American chefs. What remains a mystery is why so many of us enjoy umami. I think it may have evolved to guide us to protein-rich foods.

The MSG connection

Monosodium glutamate (MSG), a synthetic derivative of glutamic acid, was created to stimulate umami receptors, but I prefer natural sources of the taste. I think MSG makes foods too salty, and even though medical experts haven’t linked normal amounts to any serious health problems, I know many people who are sensitive to this ingredient.

Dr. Weil Explains...

...concerns over phytates and mineral absorption.

Phytates, also called phytic acid, are antioxidant compounds found in foods such as whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. Unlike other antioxidants, these substances are known to hinder mineral absorption by latching onto iron, zinc, manganese, and, to a much lesser extent, calcium. But this shouldn’t concern you if you’re eating a well-balanced diet. Most people consume enough minerals that there are still plenty left over which aren’t impaired by phytates. The only people who may need to watch their intake are vegetarians who eat a lot of wheat bran (a concentrated source of phytates), since it’s possible that they’re lacking in iron and zinc.

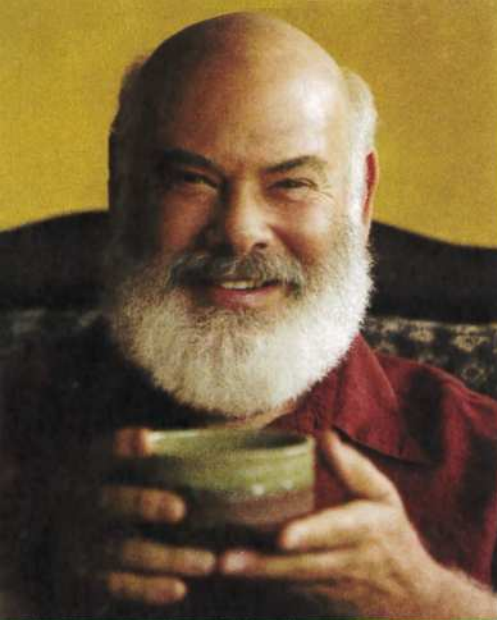
Whatever you do, don’t eliminate phytic acid from your diet. Research has shown that phytates have anti-inflammatory effects and other health benefits. In laboratory experiments, these compounds help normalize cell growth and stop the proliferation of cancer cells. And they may help prevent cardiovascular disease and lower a food’s glycemic load, benefiting people with diabetes.

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- Tuning In to Your Gut
- Seasonal Allergy Guide
- Stroke Surge in Women



Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing

APRIL 2008

Creating Optimum Health for Your Body and Soul

Tips for Better Health

A hearty breakfast may be key to **managing your weight in middle age**. People aged 40 to 75 who ate a greater proportion of their total daily calories in the morning put on fewer pounds than those who ate more food later in the day.

Drinking plenty of tea—three or more cups a day—can help women **cut the risk of heart disease** and stroke by keeping plaque from building up in arteries, according to a recent study by French scientists.

A personal digital assistant (PDA) can help you **stick to your workout routine**. New research suggests that scheduling exercise reminders in your electronic calendar can double the amount of time you spend getting fit.

Folic acid may be **protective against Alzheimer's disease**. Scientists report that older people with low levels of this B vitamin were 3.5 times more likely to develop dementia.

Trust Your Instincts

Learn to use intuition to your advantage

I may not rely solely on my gut feeling or intuition, but I often use it. When meeting people, I tune in to what my body tells me about whether I want to be involved with them. In work situations, I consider intuitive feelings when deciding whether to start a new project. Paying attention to how you feel—whether it's a warm attraction or an uneasy feeling—can not only help guide you through decision-making, but can also help you better expend energy, reduce stress, and improve relationships.

Intuition was once regarded as a rare gift, but we now recognize that everyone uses it to some extent. Brain-imaging studies show that intuition isn't rooted in one part of the brain, but correlates with many sites involved in unconscious activity. It influences your decisions even when you may not be able to explain why you made them. Such findings may help clarify why the more experience you have in a certain area, the more reliable your intuition tends to be.

The body speaks Intuition is a skill that can be honed. "The simple act of paying attention to your intuitive responses over time can help better utilize it," according to Belleruth Naparstek, a psychotherapist who specializes in guided imagery, and author of *Your Sixth Sense*

(HarperCollins, 1998). While often described as a "gut feeling," physical signs may vary. Some people have a tightening in the stomach or feel pleasantly energized, while others experience mental clarity or a flash of thought, such as "I have to get out of here" or "Something good is about to happen."

Naparstek suggests keeping a journal. Write down inner sensations at the time, any emotions or shifts in mood, and the eventual accuracy of your insight. You'll have a record that shows a pattern of when your intuition is most dependable.

How to dig deeper You can get in touch with your unconscious—the place where gut feelings stem from—by practicing breath work, meditation, or guided imagery. These mind-body practices can increase intuition by opening channels between the conscious and unconscious mind. The next time you're faced with a decision, Naparstek suggests this exercise: Frame the question for a yes or no response and then check in with your body. Focus on your center, such as the chest or gut. If you feel muscles contract, the answer is no. If there is softening, the answer is yes. Practice with less difficult questions and then you'll have more confidence relying on your intuition when making more important choices.

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My Take on the News

- + The Latest Research
- + Notable Findings
- + Get My Opinion

Dear Reader Laugh More for Better Health

Berries Offer Powerful Heart Benefits



Eating berries may boost HDL ("good") cholesterol and lower blood pressure, say Finnish re-

searchers. During an eight-week trial, half of the 72 middle-aged men and women consumed two portions (a total of about 5 ounces) of berries daily—including whole, puréed, or juiced raspberries, strawberries, and other berries—while the other half didn't. In the berry group, HDL levels rose more than 5 percent, and systolic blood pressure fell by an average of 1.5 points. (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, February 2008)

My take This is great news. There are few ways to increase HDL cholesterol, and eating berries is not only easy but good for health in other ways. The benefits seen in this study are likely due to the pigments (anthocyanins) in intensely colored berries. Other studies suggest these antioxidants may help prevent heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Alternative Therapies Work for Neck Pain

A new report on neck pain concludes that hands-on therapies and other natural approaches are often more effective than surgery and other high-tech treatments. After reviewing more than 350 studies, researchers found that educational videos, exercise, and therapies such as spinal adjustments, massage, and acupuncture appeared to be beneficial, although no particular approach proved more effective. (*Spine*, February 15, 2008)

My take Surgery for chronic neck pain should be a last resort, after all nonsurgical treatments are tried. Even before you turn to pain-relieving drugs, I suggest using massage, stretching exercises, and relaxation methods. In addition, consider acupuncture, physical therapy, or the Alexander Technique or Feldenkrais Method to improve movement. Osteopathic manipulation, which uses hands-on techniques to relieve tight joints and muscles, may also be worth exploring.

Acupuncture Boosts Fertility Chances



A review of seven studies involving more than 1,300 women found acupuncture can increase the odds

of becoming pregnant among women having in-vitro fertilization (IVF). In all studies, women were assigned to have acupuncture soon before or after embryos were placed in the womb or to have fake or no acupuncture. Among women who got acupuncture, the rates of pregnancy were 65 percent higher and the rates of live births were nearly twice as high than among women in the other groups. (*BMJ* online, February 7, 2008)

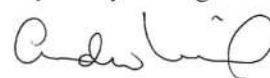
My take I've always recommended traditional Chinese medicine (including acupuncture) for infertility. Researchers theorize the needling technique may work by reducing stress, increasing blood flow to the reproductive organs, and helping to normalize ovulation. IVF is expensive and can be very stressful, and I'd encourage anyone undergoing this procedure to consider Chinese medicine.

April Fools' Day is a great time for me to tell you about some intriguing research on the healing power of laughter. Sure, laughing makes you feel good, but we now know that it can affect the body on a genetic level. Back in 2003, Japanese scientists measured the blood sugar levels of 19 diabetics after they sat through a serious lecture, and on another day after they laughed at a comedy show. Despite eating similar meals on both days, the participants had lower blood glucose levels after enjoying the comedy.

Then in a 2006 study also involving diabetic patients, the researchers found 23 genes that showed different activity following laughter. Eighteen of these genes help control immune response and signal transmission between cells, while the functions of the other five are currently unknown.

To my knowledge, this is the first evidence that emotional factors can influence gene expression. As laughter research continues, these scientists are optimistic: "One day it won't be a joke to see patients receive a prescription for a comedy [DVD] at a pharmacy for medical treatment," according to geneticist Kazuo Murakami.

I certainly think a sense of humor helps keep life in perspective and is a wonderful stress-buster, and I encourage you to seek out opportunities to tickle your funny bone. Spend more time with friends who make you chuckle, watch funny movies or TV shows, check out a local comedy club, display cartoons that crack you up, visit satirical websites (such as *theonion.com*), or just get silly with your dog.


Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, is the founder and director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The author of *Healthy Aging*, *8 Weeks to Optimum Health*, and *Spontaneous Healing*, Dr. Weil is a graduate of Harvard Medical School. He also established **The Weil Foundation**, a nonprofit organization that supports integrative medicine by funding training for practitioners, research, innovations in patient care, and policy reform.

Smart Ways to Savor Soy

Tips for choosing and preparing this versatile superfood

I've long enjoyed soy as part of my daily diet, turning to foods like tofu and tempeh for their abundant supply of protein, fiber, and B vitamins. Offering some omega-3 fatty acids and a low amount of saturated fat, soy-based foods also contain compounds called isoflavones that may help lower cholesterol, tame hot flashes in menopausal women, and help protect against osteoporosis, heart disease, and cancer.

My favorite ways to consume soy include snacking on edamame (green soybeans), adding tofu to stir-fries and shakes, substituting soy milk for the dairy variety when cooking, and using smoked tempeh strips as an alternative to bacon. But soybeans can be made into other foods, such as cheese, nut butter, yogurt, flour, and frozen desserts.

Given soy's remarkable versatility, it shouldn't be difficult to find soy foods that please your palate. Here are my suggestions for choosing the best products and infusing your everyday menu with those health-boosting foods.

GETTING STARTED I typically recommend getting one or two daily servings of soy, which would deliver about 40 to 80 mg of isoflavones. (See chart for a typical serving size.) Since soy can cause gas in some people, I'd advise adding it to your diet gradually. Begin by eating small amounts of fermented soy products, such as tempeh or miso, which are easier to digest and less likely to produce flatulence. Slowly increase your intake of non-fermented soy foods over time, and consider taking a probiotic supplement to stimulate digestion.

SHOPPING FOR SOY FOODS

Before you hit the market, brush up on these tips for selecting quality soy foods:

- Soy crops are often heavily sprayed with pesticides and other agricultural chemicals, it's so important to **purchase organic products**. Buying organic also



ensures that the product doesn't contain genetically modified (GM) soybeans. One study found that GM soybeans have a 12 to 14 percent lower isoflavone content than the non-GM variety.

- It's always smart to cut back on processed foods, so I would **limit products that list soy isolate or isolated soy protein as main ingredients**. Go for whole soy foods as often as possible. When choosing soy-based mock meats, look for products whose primary ingredients include organic tofu (such as the imitation sausages and sliced meats made by Tofurky) or organic tempeh.
- Even though soy foods contain mostly heart-healthy fats, many products are high in calories. If you're watching your weight, **seek out reduced-calorie or low-fat soy foods** whenever available.

- Many soy milks provide about 60 mg of calcium per cup, accounting for just 5 to 6 percent of your daily calcium needs. But if you **opt for calcium-fortified soy milk**, you can get about 200 mg of calcium per serving. I'd also encourage looking for soy milks that don't contain carrageenan. This seaweed-derived thickener has been linked to gastrointestinal cancers in some animal studies.

SERVING UP SOY Just as soy takes many forms, each type of soy food can be prepared in numerous ways.

- Tofu does a great job of soaking up other flavors, so I like to marinate it in garlic, red wine, vinegar, soy sauce, and other spices before including it in dishes such as kebabs and stir-fries. (You can also buy baked, pressed tofu that's already been flavored.) Plus, you can stir soft tofu into dips, or magically transform it into pudding and pie filling. Or crumble extra-firm tofu into quiches.
- In addition to using soy milk as an alternative to cow's milk in cereal or tea, you can blend plain or flavored varieties into puddings and smoothies.
- With a chewy, meatlike texture, tempeh can replace ground beef in many recipes. One way I like to serve tempeh is to marinate a hunk of it and grill like a burger.
- It's delicious on its own, but edamame makes for a satisfying addition to salads and soups as well. You can also purée the soybeans, blend with olive oil and garlic, and use as a dip or pasta sauce.

Serving size	Calories	Soy protein	Isoflavones
Tofu ½ cup	95 to 180	9 to 13 g	35 to 40 mg
Soy milk 1 cup	100 to 150	4 to 10 g	20 to 40 mg
Tempeh ½ cup	160	16 g	40 mg
Edamame ½ cup	95	6 g	35 mg

Fend Off Hay Fever

Natural alternatives to allergy medication

Americans miss nearly four million days of work each year due to hay fever (allergic rhinitis). Symptoms such as sneezing, watery eyes, and a runny, itchy nose can make you feel miserable. Here's my advice for seasonal allergies, with help from Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, an allergist and medical director of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine.

TAKE SUPPLEMENTS. Quercetin, a flavonoid compound found in apples and onions, is a good preventive supplement. It reduces the body's inflammatory response to pollen and other allergens. If symptoms do flare up, my preferred remedy is stinging nettle, an herb that I think does a better job than antihistamine drugs and has fewer side effects. If symptoms persist, try butterbur: Studies suggest this botanical may be an effective treatment. (See chart for doses.)

EAT THE RIGHT FOODS. Because rhinitis is inflammation of the nasal membranes, an anti-inflammatory diet can play an important role in reducing allergic reactions there (and elsewhere).

Boost your intake of omega-3 fats (found in wild salmon and freshly ground flax seeds) and antioxidant-rich produce (berries and dark leafy greens are best). Cut back on cow's milk products, polyunsaturated vegetable oils, and trans fats.

RINSE YOUR SINUSES. Flushing the nose with a warm saltwater solution can help remove pollen and soothe swollen membranes. You can do this with a cupped hand, bulb syringe, or neti pot, a ceramic vessel (see drweilselfhealing.com).

TRY MIND-BODY MEDICINE. I consider allergies to be learned immune responses, so I think they can be "unlearned" through mind-body methods such as guided imagery and hypnosis. In a 2005 study, people with hay fever who practiced self-hypnosis regularly needed less allergy medication.

EXPLORE CHINESE MEDICINE. Adults with hay fever who had weekly acupuncture sessions while taking a customized Chinese herbal formula for six weeks experienced less-severe symptoms during a 2004 study. To find a Chinese medicine practitioner, visit nccaom.org.



GOOD FOR YOU!

The "Perfect" Diet

A perfectionistic attitude toward eating may elicit cravings, then guilt after consuming "forbidden" fare. Here's a tip from Harvard psychologist Alice Domar, PhD, on setting realistic eating goals.

If you're mad at yourself for anything less than 100 percent compliance to a healthy diet, it's time to change the way you think and follow the 80/20 eating plan. If you eat carefully for 80 percent of your diet, you can take liberties with the other 20 percent. The 80/20 plan is based on the realistic expectation that you can't eat nutritiously *all* the time, but you can do it *most* of the time.

Some women eat well on weekdays and indulge with some treats on weekends. Others save their 20 percent for afternoons, when they crave snacks. The beauty of the 80/20 plan is that it reduces anxiety about maintaining a healthy diet by allowing you occasional extravagances. It doesn't come naturally to all-or-nothing perfectionists, but with practice, you can become comfortable with this approach and reap benefits from it.

Source *Be Happy Without Being Perfect* by Alice Domar, PhD, and Alice Lesch Kelly (Crown, 2008)

Supplements That Can Help

QUERCETIN

Prevention

Dose A few weeks before allergy season, start taking 400 to 600 mg twice daily between meals and continue through the season. Children under 10 can take half as much.

Other information

Products with vitamin C or bromelain may increase quercetin's absorption.

STINGING NETTLE

Treatment: 1st choice

Dose Take one to two 300-mg freeze-dried capsules every three to four hours as needed to control symptoms. Children old enough to swallow capsules (age six or so) can take a capsule daily.

Other information

I like the product from the Eclectic Institute.

BUTTERBUR

Treatment: 2nd choice

Dose Take 50 mg two to four times a day with meals. Children 10 and older can use the same dose; ages six to nine can take 50 mg a day.

Other information

Choose products free of pyrrolizidine alkaloids (toxic to the liver). A reliable brand is Petadolex.

Note: It's fine to take all three of these supplements together.

Health Alert: Preventing Stroke

Three key strategies to protect yourself against this growing threat

Stroke is the third-highest cause of death behind heart disease and cancer. About 60 percent of stroke deaths occur in women, and I recently read a surprising study that indicates mid-life stroke is far more common in women than in men (*Neurology*, November 2007). Researchers followed over 17,000 people for five years and found that women aged 45 to 54 were more than twice as likely to have suffered a stroke as their male counterparts. One possible reason: Stroke risk factors seem to increase at a faster rate in women. Fortunately, dietary and other lifestyle changes can reduce many of those risks. Here are my latest recommendations to protect yourself against stroke.

1 | Recognize the risk factors.

Because a stroke results from impaired circulation to the brain, it shares many of the characteristics of other cardiovascular diseases. For example, high blood pressure is the top risk factor for stroke, and the study above found blood pressure increases more in women than in men during mid-life. Cholesterol levels also may rise more quickly for women within this age range. And inflammation leaves you more vulnerable to blood vessel problems such as stroke.

High blood sugar is another concern. "There's a large gray zone of blood sugar levels that are not in the diabetic range (126 mg/dl or higher) but that still put you at risk for damage to blood vessels," says Stephen Devries, MD, a preventive cardiologist at the Center for Integrative Medicine at Northwestern University. Anything over 100 mg/dl (the cutoff point for prediabetes) has the potential to cause problems, he explains.

In addition, researchers suspect that increased abdominal obesity is a major reason for the recent stroke surge in women. Fat deposits in the belly are more dangerous than extra weight carried



"You can greatly lower your risk by keeping your cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels normal."

elsewhere on the body, and abdominal obesity appears to be a stronger risk factor for stroke in women than in men.

2 | Get tested. "This really speaks to the power of prevention," Dr. Devries says. In middle age, monitor your health closely and don't postpone identifying, and then minimizing, your risk factors. First, request some simple tests from your physician. The tests should check your blood pressure, cholesterol profile, sugar level (glucose), and high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP), a blood marker for inflammation in the body.

If you have a family history of heart disease or stroke, additional blood work can be helpful, including tests for the size and number of cholesterol particles (smaller particles are more dangerous and may increase the risk of a cholesterol level that otherwise appears normal); Lp(a), a sticky, inherited form of cholesterol; and homocysteine, an amino acid linked to a higher risk of cardiovascular disease.

3 | Practice prevention. Once you know your problem areas, you can strategically lower your risk. I advise everyone to exercise regularly because it can address all the factors that contribute to cardiovascular disease. Aim for 30 minutes of aerobic activity at least five days a week. Strength training that involves heavy lifting can further elevate blood pressure, so check with your doctor before beginning this type of regimen.

Dietary changes can also make you less susceptible to stroke. Studies show that lowering your sodium intake and eating foods high in potassium, vitamin C, folic acid, and fiber can slash stroke risk. You can meet all of these recommendations by eating an anti-inflammatory diet that emphasizes healthy fats, avoids refined and processed foods, and is plentiful in fresh vegetables and fruits. "Fresh produce is the best medicine you can buy," according to Dr. Devries.

Tobacco and alcohol play a role too. Smokers double their risk of the most common type of stroke, so if you smoke, kick the habit. Other studies have found that moderate alcohol consumption (no more than one drink a day for women and two a day for men) may cut stroke risk up to 33 percent.

To help protect your blood vessels, Dr. Devries also suggests taking a good-quality multivitamin and eating at least two fish meals a week. In addition, I advise taking 2 to 3 grams of fish oil daily. I also recommend talking to your doctor about taking aspirin, which can help prevent blood clots that may cause stroke. Finally, emotional stress can worsen many cardiovascular risk factors: Try relaxation techniques such as biofeedback, breath work, meditation, and yoga to keep your stress levels in check.

For more, see *The Healthy Heart Kit* by Andrew Weil, MD, Stephen Devries, MD, and others (Sounds True, 2008). To order, visit drweilselfhealing.com.

Healthy Living

Cleaning Up Clutter?

PRO The annual spring-cleaning ritual can benefit both mind and body. Decluttering your house may reduce your risk of falls, help eliminate germs, and make it easier to find things like fitness gear. Yet, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression, chronic pain, and compulsive hoarding can hinder people from getting organized or cause clutter to pile up. To gauge the seriousness of your clutter problem or to find a professional organizer, visit nsgcd.org.

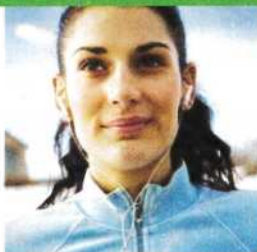
CON I recently read a fascinating book called *A Perfect Mess: The Hidden Benefits of Disorder* by Eric Abrahamson and David Freedman (Back Bay Books, 2008). They argue that the advantages of being neat are frequently outweighed by the costs. For instance, people with orderly desks report spending 36 percent *more* time finding things. On a messy desk, the more urgent work “tends to stay close by and near the top of the clutter,” say the authors, “while the safely ignorable stuff tends to get buried.” They say moderately disorganized people often turn out to be more efficient and creative.

Mind & Body

Put Some Rhythm in Your Step

BORING WORKOUT? Turn up the volume. Music can be a useful stimulant when you find yourself dragging. Studies suggest that listening to music while exercising may increase motivation and divert attention away from negatives like fatigue. Your movements, as well as body processes such as heart rate and respiration, can synchronize to the beat of an up-tempo song through a process called entrainment, often making for longer and more enjoyable workouts.

WHAT TO PLAY? Listen to what you like and what will keep you motivated, though I would lean toward selections with a lively tempo. Researchers suggest choosing songs with 120 to 140 beats per minute—more or less equal to the average person’s heart rate during a workout. (Song compilations for fitness enthusiasts often include dance music with similar beats-per-minute counts.) Studies suggest avoiding music such as free-form jazz or hard-core punk during exercise because of their sudden changes in beat.



A feline companion may do your heart good, says a new study. **Cat owners were less likely to die of a heart attack** or other cardiovascular disease. The study didn’t include enough dog owners to show if dogs help.

Men, learn your risk of prostate cancer by using an online calculator at prostaterisk.ca. The results can help you and your doctor determine if you need to take preventive measures to lower your chances.

Ask Dr. Weil

Q What are your thoughts on herbs imported from China?

A I would avoid them. I’m disturbed by reports that some Chinese herbal products have been found to contain toxic contaminants, including heavy metals and potent prescription drugs. A 2007 analysis of 90 Chinese herbal products or patent medicines purchased in New York City’s Chinatown found five samples that contained nine different undeclared Western pharmaceuticals. Other research has turned up heavy metals such as lead, mercury, and arsenic in Chinese herbal formulas. Until China has better manufacturing practices, don’t buy herbal remedies produced there unless you have reliable advice. If possible, get equivalents made in the United States.

Q What do you think of taking borage oil capsules to help control inflammation?

A I prefer other supplements. Borage oil is a natural source of GLA (gamma-linolenic acid), a unique fatty acid with anti-inflammatory properties. Studies suggest that taking GLA may ease symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, but borage oil may also contain compounds called pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs) that can damage the liver. Instead, try capsules of evening primrose or black currant oil. Both are good sources of GLA and free of toxins. Besides reducing inflammation, GLA also improves the health of skin, hair, and nails and can be helpful for premenstrual syndrome. A typical dose for all of these purposes is 500 mg of either evening primrose or black currant oil twice daily with meals.

3 Ways to Look Your Best

Facial exercises to maintain a youthful glow

Q Is instant oatmeal as good for you as cooking it yourself?

A It depends on the brand. Some instant oatmeals contain partially hydrogenated oils, artificial flavors and colors, or unnecessary amounts of sugar and salt. I would stick with organic brands: Besides boasting all-natural ingredients, they may be higher in fiber. (I recently launched two organic oatmeal varieties with Nature's Path.) If you're making oatmeal from scratch, you can enhance the flavor and nutritional value by adding fresh or dried berries and nuts. Preparing oatmeal with fortified soy milk will give you a calcium boost and a creamier texture.

Q You said omega-6 oils were linked to memory problems. How much is too much?

A The study in question, which I discussed in the January issue, defined "regular users" as those consuming such oils at least once a week. I generally avoid polyunsaturated vegetable oils, such as sunflower, safflower, corn, and soy oils, because they're high in omega-6 fats that promote inflammation (Alzheimer's disease begins as an inflammatory process in the brain). High-oleic sunflower and safflower oils are fine: They are richer in healthier monounsaturated fats. I occasionally use small amounts of grape-seed oil, another omega-6 oil, for high-temperature cooking, but I don't consume it regularly.

The simplest way to lower your intake of omega-6 fats is to cut down on processed, manufactured, and fast food.

Please send your health questions and comments to **Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing**, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown, MA 02472.

Botox injections and facelift surgeries aren't the only ways to minimize signs of aging on your face. Below are three self-care techniques that may help rejuvenate your skin and let you put your best face forward.

YOGA

"Exercising shortens muscles, so we end up with a tighter, firmer face as we tone the musculature underneath," says Marie-Véronique Nadeau, a California-based aesthetician and author of *The Yoga Face-lift* (Conari, 2007). She suggests the Lion pose to work muscles in your face and neck as well as to relieve tension.

How to: Start by kneeling on the floor. Then sit back on your heels and rest your hands on top of your knees. Take a deep breath. Exhale forcefully while making an O with your mouth, then smile without changing the O shape. Next, open your eyes wide and look up. Extend your tongue out and down towards your chin. Now stretch out your fingers, tense them, and make a *Rrrrrr* sound. On a count of three, lean forward so that your fingertips touch the ground and you're kneeling. Growl for a count of 10 and then sit back and relax. Repeat two more times.

MASSAGE

Facial massage improves circulation in the face, explains Simon Marxer, the spa director at Miraval Life in Balance resort in Arizona. "In turn," he says, "the improved circulation increases the amount of oxygen reaching the tissue, which keeps your face looking young and radiant." On an energetic level, says Colorado-based qigong master Kenneth Cohen, massage can stimulate the facial muscles by influencing the body's flow of vital en-

ergy or *qi*. Try this exercise from his book *The Way of the Qigong* (Ballantine, 1999).

How to: Cohen suggests practicing each of the following steps 10 times.

1 Rub your palms together to generate warmth and lightly circle them over your face. Next, chafe one palm back and forth across your forehead.

2 Place the middle finger of each hand on either side of your mouth. Run the fingers up along the side of the nose to your hairline and then back again to help open up the sinuses.

3 Use your thumbs' knuckles to apply moderate pressure to the bone surrounding the eyes and slowly follow the circle. Reverse direction. When finished, rub palms together until they are warm and place over closed eyes.

4 Tap around your mouth and cheeks in order to stimulate the gums.

5 Gently knead earlobes between your thumb and index finger. Then place palms over ears while tapping fingertips on the back of the head.

6 Circle your warmed palms over your entire face and scalp.

ACUPRESSURE

When used together, the two acupressure points ST 2 and ST 3 may help with sagging cheeks, in addition to improving complexion, by boosting facial circulation, according to Michael Reed Gach, director of the Acupressure Institute in Berkeley, California, and author of *Acupressure's Potent Points* (Bantam, 1990).

How to: Place your index finger one finger width below the lower ridge of your eye socket, in line with the center of the eye. Place middle finger horizontally under it. Apply pressure to these points with fingertips for one minute, pressing firmly enough to feel a slight pressure.

Nutrition & Health Public Forum

Join me and David Wallinga, MD, as we speak about eating well in an era of industrialized food. The event, which will include a question-and-answer session, takes place on Sunday, April 13, from 2 to 4 pm at the Arizona Grand Resort, Phoenix. Tickets \$20 each. Register: nutritionandhealthconf.org

Comforts of Home

Innovative living options for active seniors

I'm starting to have conversations with friends about what type of living arrangement is ideal for aging well. I don't have a plan yet, but I'd like a combination of privacy and communal living. While I value my independence, I enjoy cooking and eating with friends, watching movies together, and mixing with all ages.



Things to consider What makes deciding where to spend your senior years easier than even a decade ago is the proliferation of options that have sprouted up in recent years. To start the brainstorming process, make a list of things that you desire as you age. Do you plan to work or volunteer? Is it important to have access to a cultural center? What climate do you prefer? How important is being near family and friends? Also, talk openly with friends and family. Together, you may come up with some unique approaches that you might not have considered before. Below are a few choices that have been growing in popularity.

Organizing at home The majority of seniors in America want to live at home as long as they can, according to recent surveys, and communities are organizing to make it possible. Beacon Hill Village, created by and for residents of this Boston neighborhood, is one model that

has garnered praise from senior advocacy groups. The nonprofit group offers its more than 400 members access to social activities, exercise classes, home maintenance services, and medical assistance, often at a discount. Members include retirees in their 90s as well as working people in their 50s who pay \$580 annually (low to moderate income resi-

dents are subsidized). This organization created a manual that other neighborhoods can use to develop their own programs (visit beaconhillvillage.org to purchase). Some government programs offer similar assistance. Visit the National Association of State Units on Aging (nasua.org) for resources in your area.

Looking to move Marketers are tapping into the needs of aging baby boomers by meeting demands for an active lifestyle. Some college towns launch aggressive campaigns to attract them with small town appeal, culture, and youth. Another growing trend is "active adult communities." Unlike retirement communities introduced in the 1960s, developers have traded in shuffleboards for volleyball courts, and amenities like computer labs and spas are commonplace.

For more ideas, visit aarp.org/families/housing_choices and seniorresource.com.

Dr. Weil Explains...

...how to stay healthy when flying.

One study suggests you're more than 100 times as likely to catch a cold on a plane as in your ordinary daily rounds. The problem is less likely to be recirculated air than extremely low cabin humidity at high elevations. Many commercial airlines fly at 30,000 to 35,000 feet, where humidity often runs at 10 percent or lower. Such arid conditions can dry up the protective mucus that lines your nose and throat, making it easier for germs to get a foothold. To help avoid colds, stay hydrated by sipping bottled water throughout your flight. Diana Fairechild, author of the book *Jet Smarter: The Air Traveler's RX* (to order, visit flyana.com), also suggests lightly swabbing the inside of the nose with food-grade oil such as olive oil to keep the area moist and more comfortable.

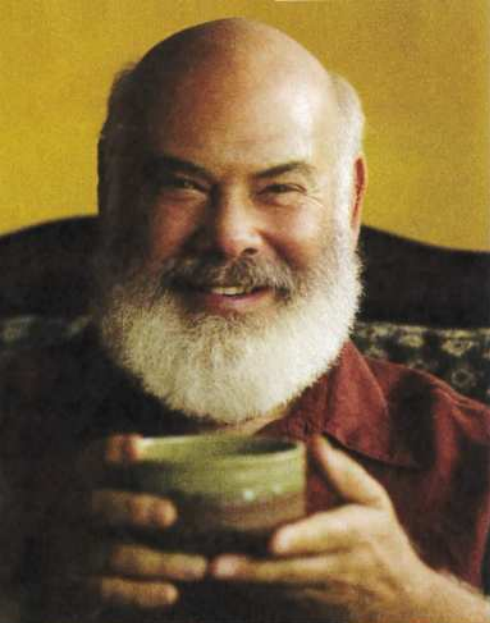
TWO MORE TIPS I often take echinacea as an immune-booster the day before I fly and the day of my flight. And I carry an alcohol-based gel to cleanse my hands; arm rests, tray tables, lavatory fixtures, and other shared surfaces may be laden with germs.

NEXT
ISSUE

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- Growing Healing Herbs
- Adult Vaccinations

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Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing

MAY 2008

Creating Optimum Health for Your Body and Soul

Tips for Better Health

Check pollen counts in your area before heading outdoors to **prevent spring allergies**. You can find up-to-date information on pollen from trees, weeds, and grasses on the website of the National Allergy Bureau: aaaai.org/nab.

It's good for your health to keep your spouse happy. According to new findings from Brigham Young University, a **happy marriage lowers blood pressure**, but a stressful one does just the opposite.

Just three 20-minute sessions of low-intensity aerobic exercise per week can **increase energy levels by 20 percent**, says a study of 36 previously sedentary adults who complained of frequent fatigue.

Soaking potatoes in water for 30 minutes to two hours before frying can **reduce the formation of acrylamide** (a potential carcinogen) by 38 to 48 percent. Just washing them lowers levels by 23 percent.

Connect with Nature

Being active outdoors benefits both body and mind

A highlight of my day is swimming laps in my outdoor pool. I'll do the front crawl for 20 minutes, interspersed with some backstroking for another 10. Just as important as the actual exercise is my time outside, getting fresh air and sunlight and taking in the sky, clouds, and trees. Connecting with nature helps to get me out of my head and frees me from everyday concerns. Marveling at the immensity, power, and beauty of the natural world boosts my mood and nourishes my spirit.

With spring in full swing, I encourage you to take advantage of the warmer weather by being more active outdoors. Even a simple stroll through a city park can do wonders for your mental outlook.

A troubling trend Americans are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature, according to a study published in February. Researchers looked at trends in various measures of "nature-based recreation," such as visits to national parks and forests and time spent hiking or camping. Since the late 1980s, the percentage of Americans taking part in these activities has fallen by about 1 percent annually. The cumulative effect of this slow but steady decline is dramatic: Participation levels are down 18 to 25 per-

cent in a single generation! And the United States isn't an isolated case: National parks in Japan and Spain have experienced similar decreases in usage.

Meanwhile, people are spending more time being sedentary in front of computer and TV screens, the researchers note. They warn that less exposure to nature, particularly during childhood, may decrease societal interest in conservation.

Lessons from Europe One hopeful sign is an increasing interest in the physical and emotional benefits of "green exercise" in several European countries. Last fall, a public agency called Natural England launched nine demonstration projects around the nation to encourage activities ranging from gardening, cycling, and walking in urban green areas to kite flying and conservation projects in the countryside. And in the Netherlands and Norway, agricultural work at hundreds of "green care" farms is considered a valid treatment option for people with mental health problems. I hope that these innovative ideas will inspire citizens and policymakers in the United States to seek out more ways to foster connections with the environment.

To learn more about recreation areas near you, visit recreation.gov.

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My Take on the News

- + The Latest Research
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Soy Protects Against Breast Cancer

A new Japanese study offers more evidence that eating whole soy foods such as tofu can reduce breast cancer risk. In the study, 24,226 women aged 40 to 69 filled out diet surveys and gave blood to test for levels of isoflavones—phytoestrogenic compounds in soy. Ten years later, researchers found that those with the highest blood levels of the isoflavone genistein had one-third the risk of developing breast cancer compared to women with the lowest levels. Women with high genistein levels ate about 3.5 ounces of tofu per day. (*Journal of Clinical Oncology*, April 1, 2008)

My take This is among the first studies to link higher blood levels of a soy isoflavone with lower breast cancer risk. Yet, the researchers warned that taking isoflavone supplements—which may contain much higher levels of these compounds—might increase breast cancer risk.

Dietary Flavonoids Decrease Inflammation

A new study suggests that eating foods rich in antioxidant flavonoids reduces levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a blood marker of inflammation. This finding helps explain other research that has linked flavonoid-rich diets with reduced risk of disorders for which chronic inflammation may be an underlying cause, including heart disease, Alzheimer's, and cancer. Scientists looked at data from 8,335 adults, and found lower CRP levels in people with the greatest intake of fla-

vonoids. Certain flavonoids were especially beneficial, such as quercetin (found in apples and onions), kaempferol (in broccoli and tea), and genistein (in soy). (*Journal of Nutrition*, April 2008)

My take If we needed more evidence of the health-protective effects of including a variety of fruits and vegetables in the diet, here it is. Flavonoid-rich foods are key components of the anti-inflammatory diet I recommend for healthy aging and optimum health at any age. For more on flavonoids, see the October 2007 issue.



Step Toward Better Health

Decreasing your average daily activity—like opting for the elevator over the stairs—can increase risk factors for heart disease and diabetes after only 14 days. A small Danish study divided men into two groups based upon 6,000 and 10,000 daily step averages; all were asked to decrease steps to approximately 1,400 steps per day. After two weeks, both groups experienced a 7-percent increase in belly fat, even when there was no overall weight gain. After three weeks, blood glucose levels soared by almost 60 percent in both groups, and triglyceride levels rose as well. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, March 19, 2008)

My take Here is yet another study showing how quickly the smallest changes can affect health status and long-term risks. Every little bit counts, both positively and negatively. For optimum health, set 10,000 steps as your goal, but 5,000 is a step in the right direction!

Dear Reader Drugs in Our Drinking Water

I was disturbed to see the recent findings of a five-month investigation by the Associated Press, which revealed the presence of numerous pharmaceuticals—including antibiotics, anticonvulsants, mood stabilizers, and sex hormones—in the drinking water of 24 major cities throughout the United States. These substances can get into the water after unused medications are flushed down the toilet or incompletely metabolized drugs are excreted in urine or feces. Although wastewater and public drinking water supplies undergo treatment, some drug residues can remain.

The concentrations detected are far below dosage levels, but no one knows “the exact risks from decades of persistent exposure to random combinations of low levels of pharmaceuticals,” noted the investigation. Plus, drugs in waterways pose threats to wildlife.

What can you do? Drinking bottled water won't necessarily reduce your exposure, since bottlers typically don't treat or test for pharmaceuticals, and some simply bottle tap water. Certain types of water filters should remove drug residues along with other contaminants, including reverse osmosis, distillation, and combination carbon/KDF systems. To ensure that you're not adding to this problem, dispose of expired or unneeded medications in the trash; in some states, you can take them back to your pharmacist. Also, encourage your local water department to test for pharmaceuticals (many utilities don't) and urge them to make the results public. To learn more about tap water quality, visit www.ewg.org/featured/220.


Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, is the founder and director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The author of *Healthy Aging*, *8 Weeks to Optimum Health*, and *Spontaneous Healing*, Dr. Weil is a graduate of Harvard Medical School. He also established **The Weil Foundation**, a nonprofit organization that supports integrative medicine by funding training for practitioners, research, innovations in patient care, and policy reform.

The World's Healthiest Diets

Why they're good for you and how to bring them home

recently learned that Iceland—a country with long, dark winters—has a surprisingly low rate of depression, including seasonal affective disorder.

The explanation appears to be their traditional diet, which is unusually rich in mood-stabilizing omega-3 fats, says Daphne Miller, MD, in her fascinating book, *The Jungle Effect* (Collins, 2008). A family physician in San Francisco and graduate Fellow at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine, Dr. Miller highlights "cold spots" on the globe where indigenous diets contribute to remarkably low levels of common illnesses, including cardiovascular disease (Crete, Greece), diabetes (Copper Canyon, Mexico), and breast and prostate cancer (Okinawa, Japan). She traveled to see how these people eat firsthand. Below are a few ways to reap the health benefits of indigenous eating.

Keep it simple. Typical American versions of native foods, such as burritos and pastas, don't provide the same benefits because we load them with unhealthy ingredients, Dr. Miller points out. When she compared an American burrito to Tarahumara Indian ones in Copper Canyon, ours contained 959 more calories, 55 grams more fat, and 2,125 mg more sodium! "We need to retrain our taste buds to appreciate the exciting flavors of simpler foods," she says. "The Tarahumarans probably wonder why we add cheese and sour cream to a burrito." The delicious native version included only black beans, red chili sauce, and shredded meat on a corn tortilla.

Select slow-digesting carbs. Carbohydrates that break down slowly—keeping blood sugar levels more even—are fixtures in native diets. Meals in Iceland often include slow-digesting, waxy potatoes, such as red and new varieties, dressed with vinegar (which slows emptying of the stomach), while Copper Canyon res-



idents eat juicy slices of jicama (a slow-release, starchy tuber) and corn tortillas. Made with coarsely ground corn, the tortillas digest slowly, especially when eaten traditional style: with beans.

Focus on fermented foods. From the yogurt in Greece and sauerkraut in Iceland to the fermented grains of Cameroon, fermented foods are also native staples. The probiotic content not only protects against digestive disorders, but according to Dr. Miller, "research suggests that having the right balance of bacteria in your gut may play a role in cancer prevention." People prone to precancerous polyps had more of the harmful *Bacteroides* species of bacteria in their gut, and fewer beneficial *Lactobacillus*.

Forage for wild-type greens. These diets emphasize locally grown produce, particularly leafy greens (known as *horta* in Crete). Greens provide antioxidants and folate that protect against heart disease and cancer, and when harvested from a garden or meadow, require physical effort to get them to the kitchen.

Aim for moderation. Native diets include foods that in large doses would be considered unhealthy, such as lard, red

meat, and feta cheese. But because these foods are expensive and scarce in indigenous cultures, they're used "the way we would use a spice," Dr. Miller explains. So the dishes are flavorful, yet pose fewer health consequences than if using these items as main ingredients.

Use your kitchen. "Research shows that if you cook at home, you're healthier," notes Dr. Miller. When Americans say they're too busy, she points out that indigenous people manage to cook without our time-saving devices. For an easy meal, she suggests placing fresh dried beans and water (at a one-to-three ratio) in a slow cooker before work. When you get home, season, top with salsa and avocado slices, and serve with corn tortillas.

Horta Omelet

To make this breakfast recipe from the Isle of Crete, Dr. Miller suggests using free-range eggs for better taste. Sprinkle the dish with fresh lemon juice to boost the flavor and help your body absorb nutrients in the greens.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cups chopped fresh greens (such as purslane, kale, or Swiss chard), with tough stems removed
- 2 tablespoons loosely crumbled feta cheese
- 3 to 4 eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 tablespoons chopped kalamata olives
- 2 lemon wedges
- Pinch of salt

Heat olive oil over medium heat, add garlic, and stir until soft. Add greens and stir until soft. Evenly distribute greens on bottom of pan and sprinkle with feta. Pour eggs over the top, and cook until they're done. Top with olives, salt, and lemon juice. Serves 2.

Source: *The Jungle Effect*

Breaking Bad Habits

Solutions for three problem behaviors

It should come as no surprise that bad habits can be hard to break: You have had a lot of practice performing the undesired behavior. Indeed, you might not even be aware you're doing it. I often recommend hypnotherapy to treat troublesome impulses. Here's a look at three common habits, including what health risks they may pose and how to get the problem under control.

NAIL BITING

While kids often shake this popular pastime, there are plenty of adults who still resort to gnawing on their fingernails—sometimes to the point of a cuticle-torn mess. Whether triggered by boredom or anxiety, nail biting can have effects that go beyond mere aesthetics.

Health risk? Touching your mouth increases your exposure to germs, making you more susceptible to whatever bug is going around. Nail biting can also lead to skin infections, although the risk is low.

Tips: Practicing relaxation techniques such as breath work, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation can reduce the emotional stress that may bring on nail biting. In addition, keep your nails filed and smooth, as rough edges may tempt you to bite. As for applying bad-tasting polishes, I'm not convinced that they ward off the avid nibbler.



SLOUCHING

It's as common as desktop computers, which frequently go hand-in-hand with this office-related ailment. Some people

start slouching early in life as a result of self-consciousness, whether you're the tallest, most buxom, or just plain shy. There's no question that good posture helps to convey confidence, and posture enthusiasts also claim that standing tall can make you look 10 pounds lighter.

Health risk? Bad posture compresses the chest and inhibits proper breathing, meaning less oxygen gets delivered to the body. Slumping also strains muscles and joints in the neck and back, setting you up for localized pain. Chronic slouching can even increase your chances of osteoarthritis resulting from the breakdown of cartilage between your vertebrae.

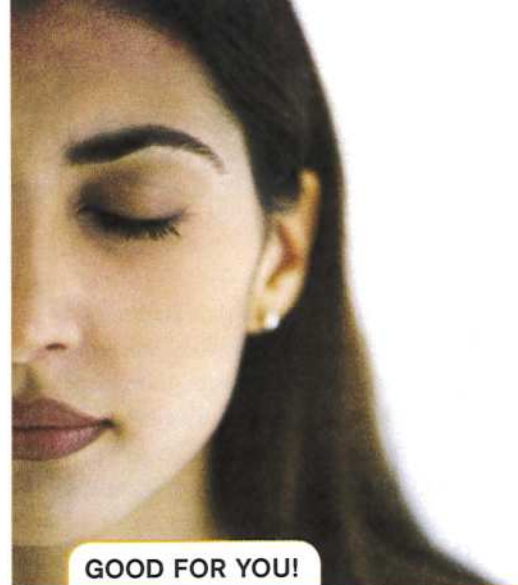
Tips: I suggest taking up yoga or working with an Alexander Technique teacher (for referrals, visit alexandertech.org) to make you more aware of your posture. And you'd do well to spend more time around other "stand-up" citizens, as it's human nature to mimic the body language of people around you. For more advice, see *The New Rules of Posture* by Mary Bond (Healing Arts Press, 2007).

KNUCKLE CRACKING

The sound of "popping" knuckles can make other people squirm, and moms commonly warn of future arthritis. While the exact cause of the cracking sound isn't known, it's likely created by the release of gases (mostly carbon dioxide) present within the synovial fluid lining the joint when the joint capsule is stretched. The "pop" could be the sound of a gas bubble being rapidly released before dissolving back into the fluid.

Health risk? The strain placed on the ligament is probably not enough to do damage, and you won't overextend the joint enough to cause arthritis. I'm a little concerned that habitual knuckle cracking could cause some swelling of the soft tissues surrounding the joint and eventually decrease grip strength, but more research is needed to settle this question. In general, this habit seems to pose few risks to your health as long as it's not accompanied by pain.

Tips: To put an end to knuckle cracking, I recommend finding something else to do with your hands (just don't start chewing on your fingernails!). Possibilities include doodling, squeezing a "stress ball," or even sitting on them.



GOOD FOR YOU!

Find Peace of Mind

Sometimes, the harder you try to rid yourself of unpleasant emotions, the stronger they become. Befriending your upset feelings can often disarm them and promote peace of mind, suggests Jeffrey Brantley, MD, a psychiatrist at Duke University and director of its Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program. Here's a calming exercise he recommends:

1. When feeling upset—from anger, fear, or worry—identify the distressing emotion and set an intention to work with it differently.
2. Inhale and exhale mindfully for several breath cycles until you feel more steady and focused.
3. Notice where the emotion is giving rise to bodily sensations.
4. Allow the sensations to be as they are, letting yourself soften and open. Widen your focus and notice other sensations nearby.
5. Take note of any angry thoughts or judgments against yourself or the emotion; don't feed or fight them. Let them come and go.
6. Rest in your feelings of inner spaciousness and wholeness.

Source *Daily Meditations for Calming Your Anxious Mind* by Jeffrey Brantley, MD, and Wendy Millstine (New Harbinger, 2008)

New Clues to Ovarian Cancer

Better understanding of symptoms offers hope for earlier detection

Ovarian cancer accounts for more deaths than any other female reproductive cancer, including cervical and endometrial. Fortunately, numbers of newly diagnosed cases are slowly declining, which I believe is due to growing awareness of the disease. But early detection—before it's able to spread—is the key to truly beating it. When ovarian cancer (OC) is found and treated at an early stage, the five-year survival rate is 92 percent. Yet, less than one-fifth of cases are found at this stage.

SYMPTOMS AND SCREENING

The question remains, "How do we find it?" Early ovarian cancer doesn't announce itself, but some light is now being shed on what's often called a "silent" disease. The first national consensus statement on OC symptoms was issued in late 2007 by the Gynaecologic Cancer Foundation. Possible signs include bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, difficulty eating or feeling full quickly, and urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency).

None of these vague symptoms is uniquely associated with ovarian cancer. "You could be bloated because you ate too many beans; you could have pelvic pain from endometriosis or an ovarian cyst," says Victoria Maizes, MD, executive director of the Program in Integrative Medicine. "It's really the presence of something new, different, and persistent you're looking for, not something you've been experiencing since you were a kid."

There are a handful of ways to screen for OC, and a combination of methods is often used to help diagnose the disease. A manual pelvic exam, an ultrasound (pelvic or transvaginal), and CA 125 blood test currently offer the best whole picture, suggests Dr. Maizes. The blood test isn't recommended for all women (including those without symptoms) because it can give both false-positive and false-negative readings, but "in the presence of symptoms, it is useful," she says.

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

Scientific findings are just starting to trickle in about what factors may reduce OC risk (see sidebar). Similar to general lifestyle advice for preventing cancer, the National Cancer Institute's guidelines for lowering OC risk include increasing your intake of produce and whole grains; de-

"I believe that if a woman complains about vague abdominal symptoms, it's important to screen for ovarian cancer."

creasing fat intake to less than 30 percent of calories; minimizing intake of cured, pickled, and smoked foods; and achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

In addition, Dr. Maizes suggests that drinking green tea would be wise due

to its cancer-fighting antioxidants. Getting enough vitamin D (take 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 per day) and plenty of omega-3 fatty acids (preferably from wild Alaskan salmon and fish oil supplements) might also be protective. Because OC has a genetic component, take extra care to follow all of these measures if you have a family history of the disease.

LOOKING AHEAD

Scientists are working to develop a better blood test that's more specific and accurate. There's also hope for a vaccine; one currently being studied may prevent recurrence of ovarian cancer. As we wait for scientific breakthroughs, personal vigilance is the best strategy. As Dr. Maizes advises, "Pay attention to your body, and speak up if you notice something. Early detection means early treatment, and a much better outcome."

The Latest News on Reducing Risk

These recent findings suggest ways to help prevent ovarian cancer (OC).

LOW-FAT DIET A 2007 study that tracked some 49,000 postmenopausal women for eight years found that a low-fat diet (20 percent of daily calories from fat) lowered OC risk by 40 percent compared to women on a normal-fat diet (35 percent of calories), although the protective benefits only seemed to kick in after four years of following the diet.

FLAVONOIDS Another large study from 2007, involving nearly 67,000 women, revealed that those who consumed the most antioxidant flavonoids—particularly kaempferol (found in tea and broccoli) and luteolin (in carrots, peppers, and cabbage)—reduced their risk of developing ovarian cancer by 40 percent and 34 percent, respectively.

BIRTH CONTROL PILLS Earlier this year, British researchers reaffirmed the protective benefit of oral contraceptive pills against OC, adding specific numbers regarding how much they reduce risk: For each five-year interval that women take the pill, the chances of OC decrease by 29 percent. And the anti-cancer effect seems to last 30 years after a woman stops taking them. Dr. Maizes adds, "There's very clear evidence of protection, but I wouldn't put someone on the pill simply as a prevention strategy, unless there's a high risk, such as positive family history."

Aging Well

Reinventing Retirement

TREND Increasing numbers of baby boomers are choosing to become *rehirees*—rather than *retirees*—by launching second careers in fields such as education, health care, and the nonprofit sector. Dubbed “encore careers” by Marc Freedman, author of *Encore: Finding Work That Matters in the Second Half of Life* (PublicAffairs, 2007), these alternatives to retirement can offer a welcome change. Research suggests that people who begin encore careers want more from work—more flexibility, meaning, and impact—and find these things in jobs that might pay less but prove more satisfying.

MY OPINION Retirement can bring feelings of decreased social worth, and being involved with something new and exciting can help people stay young and engaged while often giving back to their communities. If starting a new career seems daunting, volunteering may be another fulfilling option. It’s even possible that the inner rewards of an encore career may prompt you to take better care of yourself and help you live a longer, healthier life.

Healthy Eating

Pomegranate Power

ANTIOXIDANT ALL-STAR Pomegranate juice not only tastes great, it also has powerful antioxidant properties, according to two new studies. In one, UCLA and Israeli scientists found it has at least 20 percent greater antioxidant potency than red wine and other juices, including Concord grape, blueberry, orange, and apple. And in a study of elderly Chinese, drinking 8.5 ounces of pomegranate juice daily for four weeks increased the antioxidant capacity of the blood by nearly 10 percent, while apple juice had little effect. Pomegranate juice may also slow the progression of prostate cancer, reduce heart disease risk factors in people with type 2 diabetes, and even improve erectile dysfunction.

JUICE IT YOURSELF I like to cut a pomegranate in half and put it through a hand-press citrus juicer. If opting for store-bought, stick to brands that offer 100 percent pomegranate juice with no added sugar, such as POM Wonderful and R.W. Knudsen.



Eating at least one serving of leafy green vegetables a day could **reduce your risk of lung cancer** by 50 percent, suggests a recent study by Spanish researchers.

Spending money on other people or donating to charities, no matter the amount, **boosts happiness levels** more than splurging on yourself, new Canadian research suggests.

Ask Dr. Weil

Q You recommend 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 daily. Should I take divided doses?

A It’s fine to take this much vitamin D at once. Your body can absorb a lot of this vital nutrient (actually a hormone) in a short period of time. In fact, the human body can produce 10,000 IU of vitamin D within 30 minutes of full-body exposure to sunlight. And supplementing with 1,000 IU of D in a single dose poses no risk of toxicity. Evidence continues to accumulate that vitamin D offers a tremendous variety of health benefits: In addition to building stronger bones, other positive effects include preserving muscle strength, preventing falls, and—especially—protecting against cancer and autoimmune disease.

Q Is prolotherapy a good choice for knee or ankle sprains?

A Although sometimes used to speed healing of injuries in professional athletes, this treatment may be better suited for chronic musculoskeletal conditions than for minor injuries such as sprains. Offered by some MDs and osteopaths, prolotherapy involves injections of a sugar-water solution (often mixed with a local anesthetic) to affected tissues, intended to promote inflammation in the area. This stimulates the body’s natural healing response, including the growth of new tissue in ligaments and tendons. Small studies show promise for osteoarthritis of the knee and finger joints and chronic back pain, and I think prolotherapy may be worth a try for these conditions if you haven’t found relief from other approaches. (To locate practitioners in your area, visit aaomed.org.)

Got Your Shots?

Learn which vaccines you need to stay healthy

Q How do you treat Lyme disease?

A It depends on whether you're talking about acute or chronic forms of this infection transmitted by deer ticks. For acute Lyme disease, I suggest taking a 10- to 21-day course of antibiotics prescribed by your doctor. But if the infection becomes chronic, my first choice would be modern Chinese medicine, which matches traditional Chinese treatments to Western diagnoses. I've referred many patients to Qingcai Zhang, a Chinese-trained MD in New York City who specializes in chronic infectious diseases. He's seen impressive results in patients who take antimicrobial and immune-supportive herbs (with or without antibiotics) and who also receive acupuncture to regulate immunity and manage pain. For more information, visit dr-zhang.com.

Q For heart health, does it matter if I take enteric-coated or regular aspirin?

A I don't think so. Enteric-coated aspirin dissolves in the intestines, making it gentler on the stomach. I take enteric-coated brands for daily low-dose aspirin therapy, but there's conflicting evidence whether one type is better than the other for cardiac health. I'd stick with taking whichever makes you most comfortable.

Aspirin's blood-thinning and anti-inflammatory properties can help protect against heart attack, stroke, certain cancers, and possibly Alzheimer's disease. However, how much aspirin to take and how often should be discussed with your health-care provider.

Please send your health questions and comments to **Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing**, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown, MA 02472.

In the summertime of 2006, I had an unpleasant case of shingles. This viral infection usually causes a painful, blistering rash. I had no pain but extreme itching, and I wish I'd gotten the preventive shingles vaccine approved earlier that year. Vaccines aren't just for kids, yet a recent survey finds too few adults are being immunized against serious but preventable diseases. Only about 2 percent of older people have been vaccinated against shingles, and just 2 percent of eligible adults (see chart) have received a combination vaccine against tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough that came out in 2005. Only

10 percent of young women have had the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, which protects against cervical cancer.

Although vaccines aren't without risks (mostly immediate adverse reactions), these are much lower than the risks of the diseases they prevent. I'm pleased that the mercury-based preservative thimerosal has been nearly phased out of vaccines (though I still haven't seen any credible evidence that it has any causative role in autism). I stay up to date on my own immunizations, and my teenage daughter has received all of hers. (For immunization schedules for adults and children, visit cdc.gov/vaccines.)

Vaccines Advised for Certain Adults

Chickenpox	Adults who have never had chickenpox (also known as varicella) or the vaccine for it.
Hepatitis A	People traveling to the developing world, where this liver infection is common.
Hepatitis B	Adults at high risk, including health-care workers, people with multiple sex partners, men who have sex with men, IV drug users, prison inmates, and international travelers.
Human papillomavirus (HPV)	Women up to age 26 who haven't already been vaccinated, but not recommended for pregnant women.
Influenza	Yearly for adults 50 and older, health-care workers, pregnant women, and people with certain chronic illnesses. (Experts also now recommend flu shots for all school-age children.)
Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)	People born outside the United States in 1957 or later. Adults born earlier are considered immune to these three diseases, and most younger adults were vaccinated as kids.
Meningitis	First-year college students living in dormitories and travelers to some developing countries.
Pneumonia (Pneumococcus)	People 65 and older as well as those with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes.
Shingles	People 60 and older. The vaccine also protects against postherpetic neuralgia, a painful complication of shingles.
Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis (Tdap)	Adults 18 to 64 who haven't gotten this combination vaccine. Health-care workers and people around infants need it every two years to lower the risk of spreading infection.

Grow Healing Herbs

Easy-to-cultivate plants for making home remedies

These three herbs, which grow well indoors and out, can alleviate a variety of health complaints.

My gardener, Jace Mortensen, and Tieraona Low Dog, MD, director of education at the Program in Integrative Medicine and an expert on herbal medicine, offer practical advice for growing and preparing your living medicine cabinet.

CALENDULA

The yellow, orange, or red petals of this ornamental plant (also known as pot marigold) complement the desert terrain outside of my home in Arizona. Calendula seeds should be sown in a well-drained garden after the last frost. In colder climates, start the seeds indoors on top of a refrigerator or in a warm windowsill. The plant prefers partial shade and blooms in spring and fall.

How to use Calendula is an excellent skin soother. Use the following preparation as massage oil, add it to bathwater for dry skin, or apply to diaper rash. Dry flowers out of direct sun, in a single layer so they don't mold. Then, place in a jar and cover with oil (such as olive, almond, or sesame). Replace lid and gently shake every day for two weeks (add more oil if necessary to keep about 1 inch above flowers). Strain and apply.



CHAMOMILE

I keep a small pot of German chamomile in a kitchen window, where a gentle touch releases its sweet fragrance. Chamomile starts easily from seed and does well in most soils, but its delicate leaves cannot handle direct, hot sun.

How to use This calming tea is great to settle the stomach or take the edge off a rough day. It's also safe for kids. Harvest young leaves and flowers to use fresh or dried. Pour a cup of near boiling water over 1 tablespoon of the fresh herb (or half as much of the dried) and let steep for approximately five to seven minutes.

PEPPERMINT

I like to keep mint potted, as it's a hardy plant that can be invasive if left to its own devices. Whole plants are available at nurseries, and cuttings from existing plants root easily. Peppermint grows well in sun and shade and prefers moist soil.

How to use Sip this refreshing tea to aid digestion and ease gas. For sinus congestion, headache, or fever, cool the tea, dip a washcloth, and apply to the forehead. To prepare, take a small handful of fresh peppermint leaves, place in a half-gallon container of water at room temperature, and steep overnight. Strain and drink hot or store in the refrigerator.

Dr. Weil Explains...

...the importance of getting deep sleep.

Sleep progresses from lighter to deeper stages in a cyclic pattern, repeated throughout the night. Yet, many people don't reach the deepest stages and don't even know it—they miss out on sleep's healing and restorative effects. During deep sleep, muscles relax, heart and breathing rates slow, and the body produces important hormones such as melatonin and human growth hormone. Plus, lack of deep sleep promotes inflammation, linked to heart disease and cancer.

Rubin Naiman, PhD, a sleep specialist at the Program in Integrative Medicine and author of *Healing Night* (Syren, 2006), believes buzzing minds can speed internal clocks and rob us of deep ZZZs. For sounder slumber, he suggests dimming lights an hour before bedtime, sleeping in total darkness, sticking to a regular sleep routine, and meditating to calm the mind. Also, get proper treatment for conditions that interfere with sleep, and limit substances that can do likewise, including caffeine, alcohol, and certain medications.

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